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DO YOU
LOVE YOUR
MOM
and Her Two-Hit
Multi-Target
Attacks
?

6

Dachima Inaka

Illustration by **Iida Pochi.**

DO YOU
LOVE YOUR
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DO YOU LOVE YOUR MOM
AND HER SWIMSUIT?

Is Going to the Beach with Your Mom an Adventure?!

The party was sitting by the window one afternoon, just taking it easy.

Mamako had been cleaning by the entranceway and came back with a letter.

"Look what we got! 'To the honorable Mamako Oosuki.' My, how polite! Thank you!"

"Who thanks a letter? ...So what's it say?"

"I invited my child to the beach, but they instantly refused. How can I persuade a young adult like my child to join me in a little seaside fun?"

"Hmm... By 'young adult,' do they mean like our age?"

Lazily propping himself up with an elbow, Masato glanced across the table at the rest of the party.

Wise and Medhi were both savoring their tea. They definitely counted as 'young adults.' Even Porta probably did.

"The beach with my mom...? Hmm... I'd do it, I guess. I mean, if I absolutely *bad* to."

"I certainly wouldn't object to it. My mother and I frequently went to the pool at the gym together."

"My...my mom's always busy with work, so I've never gone with her...but I think it would be really fun if I could!"

"So the girls are cool with it? Makes sense, I guess. But for guys..."

"It'll be fine, Ma-kun!"

"Nope, definitely not. Wait, Mom! What are you...?"

With a confident smile, Mamako raised the Holy Sword of the Ocean, Altura.

"Great Mother Ocean...if you are a mother, too, you'll understand... Even mothers want to frolic on the beach with their children from time to time... If you know how that feels, lend me your power!"

Her motherly wish caused a miracle to take place.

An instant later, a huge volume of water gushed out of the sword, swirling around Mamako.

In the space created by this water flow, Mamako hastily started changing.

"Wait, you're just getting changed on your own? Not using the power of the sword or anything?! Uhhh... Whoaaaa! That stuff's totally see-throooooooooooooough?!"

Since it was made of water, her changing room was translucent—more like entirely transparent, actually. That aside...

The swirling waters parted, and Mamako emerged in her swimsuit.

"Hee-hee! Well? Now I'm Beach Mommy!"

"Wowww! Mamako's got a great body, not that I'm surprised."

"An inflatable ring and snacks—she's one hundred percent prepared."

"She looks ready to hit the beach! I really want to go now!"

"Then why don't we all go together right this minute?"

""Yaaay!""

"Huh? For real? Right now?"

Ignoring Masato, Mamako and the girls were getting quite hyped up.

"Now then, Ma-kun. Ready for a seaside adventure with Mommy? Let's go!"

"Yaaay... Yeah, right! No, seriously, wait! You're just gonna go dressed like that? That's the worst kind of adventure! Stoppp!!"

But Mamako seemed fully prepared to travel to the beach in her swimsuit from this very spot. Masato managed to keep his mother from going only by physically restraining her.

"Can I get an honest male perspective?"

"Go ahead, say something!
Go on! Go on!"

"I'll try my best, too!"

"Well?
Does this seem right for me?"

"I await your top-tier compliments."

"Who will thrill Ma-kun the most? It's a dress-picking contest!"

AMANTE

One of the Four Heavenly Kings of the Libere Rebellion. Appears in a tiger-striped dress to disrupt the courtship ball.

MEDHI

A high school Cleric disguising her dark side under a pure-white dress.

MAMAKO OOSUKI

Her sexy evening gown certainly gets Masato's heart racing for a number of reasons.

WISE

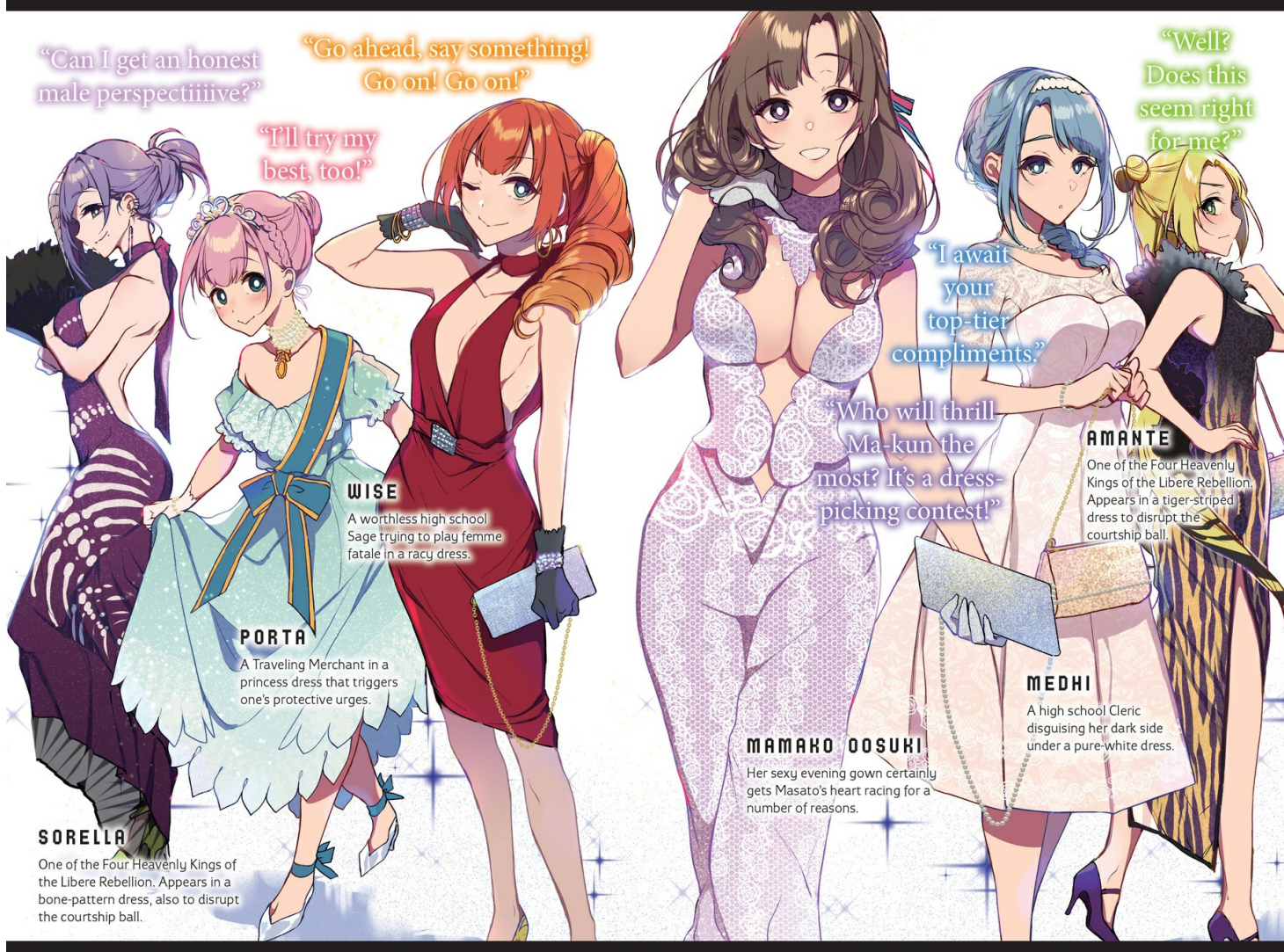
A worthless high school Sage trying to play femme fatale in a racy dress.

PORTA

A Traveling Merchant in a princess dress that triggers one's protective urges.

SORELLA

One of the Four Heavenly Kings of the Libere Rebellion. Appears in a bone-pattern dress, also to disrupt the courtship ball.



Running a shop together as a family would be wonderful.

A grand-scale courtship ball held in Catharn—the moment your intrepid reporter heard the news, he raced to the scene, surprising the woman rumored to have set up the whole thing in secret.

Mamako “Oh? Aren’t you the reporter from that magazine? Hello!”

Who else? Mamako Oosuki!

Her beautiful presence positively dazzles, just like her skill A Mother’s Light!

Mamako, a pleasure to meet you again. I’m honored you remembered me.

Mamako “Well, it’s an honor to be interviewed! It’s so nice to see you again.”

Always the picture of youth and beauty, today Mamako is wearing an elegant gown. Exquisite!

Can you tell us what made you choose that particular dress?

Mamako “It’s such a lovely design! And when I tried it on, it fit perfectly...and most of all, my son, Ma-kun, recommended it. That’s the main reason!”

Your son has done good work here!

Her ideal man is kind and thoughtful!

Since this event’s theme is courtship, allow us to ask the classic questions.

First, Mamako—what are your hobbies?

Mamako “Cooking and baking, mostly.”

Then, what sort of man are you looking for?

Mamako “What’s my type, you mean? That’s a rather difficult question...”

3, 2, 1, out with it!

Mamako “Er, w-well... Kind, thoughtful, takes care of his mother?”

All the male attendees are furiously writing that down, I see. I hope it proves helpful to them.

Running a lovely shop as a family! A lifestyle to aspire to!

Many people here are dreaming of the futures their encounters at this ball will bring.

If you were to start a new life, Mamako, what would it be?

Mamako “Well, we just opened a new shop. Perhaps that’s why I’ve been thinking about how wonderful it would be to run a shop together as a family.”

Lovely! Something to aspire to.

Mamako “I hope everyone participating in today’s courtship will create happy homes and have all their dreams come true. That’s all I wish for.”

Let’s hope this motherly wish is granted. This reporter’s prayers are with you.

I’d love to chat with you more, but...it looks like your son and his friends are waiting for you.

Mamako “Oh, you’re right! I’d better get going. Thank you for chatting with me today. I’m so glad we spoke.”

As am I. Thank you so much!

COVER GIRL
MAMAKO OOSUKI INTERVIEW

MAMAN
SPECIAL
REPORT



MAMAKO OOSUKI
INTERVIEW

Do You Love Your Mom and Her Two-Hit Multi-Target Attacks?

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Report from a Certain Admin

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Do You Love Your Mom on a Goblin-Slaying Quest?

Chapter 2

Do You Love Your Mom-Turned-Homeroom Teacher?

Chapter 3

This Is the Last Time I'm Letting Mom Fill Out Any Surveys, Ever.

Chapter 4

**Just a Little Shopping, They Say, but It Never
Actually Ends There with Moms.**

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**"Courtship Is Basically an Interview, Right?" I Said,
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Like That Even Exist? Concerning.**

Epilogue

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VOLUME 6

DACHIMA INAKA

Illustration by IIDA POCHI.



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Do You Love Your Mom and Her Two-Hit Multi-Target Attacks?, Vol. 6

Dachima Inaka

Translation by Andrew Cunningham

Cover art by Iida Pochi.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

TSUJO KOGEKI GA ZENTAI KOGEKI DE 2KAI KOGEKI NO OKASAN WA SUKI DESUKA? Vol. 6

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Prologue Report from a Certain Admin

Admin ID

11085

Test Player Pair Names

Mother: Mamako Oosuki. Child: Masato Oosuki.

Account Information

Mother: Normal Hero's Mother. Child: Normal Hero.

Both registered as Combat Licensed/Crafting Forbidden.

Summary of Primary Activity

Began playing in Catharn. Added Traveling Merchant Porta, Sage Wise, Cleric Medhi to party, moved around the world adventuring. (All three additions are test players (children). See respective accounts for details.) Current total for quests cleared: 30. (Including special requests from management.) Overall

Evaluation

SSS

Admin Comments

Mamako's housework abilities are extremely high-level, so she leads a stable life here.

At the same time, her abilities in combat, relationships, and NPC wrangling are also overwhelming, so all situations are resolved smoothly.

The mother's abilities are so powerful that the child is frequently left unable to take actions himself, but this has not created any significant issues. There were brief clashes early on, but the child has matured, and their relationship is in good shape.

I can inform you we can continue to expect great things from this pair.

Participation in Upcoming Special Event (Version 1.07) Trial Launch

I recommend the Oosukis participate.

Reporter's Name

Masumi Shirase.

In the real world, in a certain government-adjacent corporate office, Shirase sat at her computer.

After checking over the contents once more, she then submitted the form.

"Whew... For all the grief I give Masato, once I actually sit down and attempt to evaluate someone... Well, it isn't easy. That took much longer than I anticipated."

Her coworkers had all long since wrapped things up and gone home. It was well after quitting time.

Shirase herself would love nothing better than to go home to her little girl, but...

"Next I have to send Mamako another survey... So much I'd like her feedback on, but this is officially the last one. We appreciate your help, Mamako."

A survey designed to cover her entire experience in the game so far, sent via e-mail.

But still her work was not complete.

"Next... Oh, right. I have to look over the feedback we've received."

She moved her mouse, opening her in-box. It was very full. Everything from complaints like Unsure how to progress and So not fair! to useless messages like I got a rare item! All e-mails from test players other than Mamako.

There were also requests like Change my placement! or Make me a face!

"Some of these appear to have been written by NPCs... Did they ask test players to send these for them? Information sharing is important, but this isn't my responsibility."

Shirase carefully read through the important messages and skimmed the rest.

“Now, at last my work is done... Or rather, I wish it was.”

After finishing all her computer work, she turned her gaze to the corner of her desk.

Two horrifyingly thick documents, each the size of a dictionary, loomed over her.

These contained detailed countermeasure proposals for both the Libere Rebellion and Hahako. Both had a note saying *Read and submit feedback by end of day* attached to the cover.

Since she was in charge of the Oosukis, Shirase had more contact with both concerns than anyone else in admin, and consequently, work like this was very much her responsibility. She had no qualms with it being there.

But it was already very late. The deadline for picking up her daughter was approaching. She didn't have time!

Which meant...

“They're even salvaging my relationship with my daughter... They always come through in a pinch.”

She flipped rapidly through all the documents and, on the last page, included her sincerest gratitude: *We will request assistance from the Oosukis, which should resolve matters.*

Having tossed the problem to someone else, she dropped the documents back on her superior's desk and left the office with a clear conscience.

Chapter 1 Do You Love Your Mom on a Goblin-Slaying Quest?

Guardian's name:

Mamako Oosuki.

Admin supporting your adventures:

Ms. Shiraaase. (Masumi Shirase.)

Party size (If test players are included, please list their names):

Five.

Ma-kun, Wise, Medhi, Porta, Mamako Oosuki.

Please select how you were registered initially:

☒ Combat (No Crafting) ☐ Noncombat (Crafting) Looking back on your time in the game, please let us know your genuine feelings.

I'm having a fun adventure with my son, Ma-kun, and our lovely companions. Every day is so fulfilling, and I'm very happy.

Do you have any opinions on the clothing available in-game?

Most of the equipment pieces are missing tags explaining the materials and how to care for them, so it's quite concerning when I go to wash them.

I messed up washing my son Ma-kun's equipment once, so it would be a big help if you could include those. Please.

Do you have any opinions about the food available in-game?

On the rare occasions we do eat out, all the restaurants are lovely, but they are Western-style. I've never seen a shop serving ramen or sushi—or even a family restaurant. My son, Ma-kun, says he'd like to eat that kind of food sometimes, so I wish it was available.

Do you have any opinions on life inside the game?

We're using inns every day, but they're all Western-style, so we have to keep

our shoes on. I'm aware of cultural differences, but I find it quite tiring on my feet.

When staying at an inn, could we at least change to slippers in our rooms?

Do you have any opinions on the monsters that appear in the world?

Well, about monsters...

Dawn light filtered into their rooms at the inn. It was the beginning of another day of adventure.

Masato finished getting ready and found Mamako already standing at the entrance. She had a pop-up window screen open in front of her and was thinking hard.

"Yo, Mom, what's up?"

"Oh, Ma-kun. You see, management sent me another survey. I was planning on finishing it before we left, but it's a little difficult."

"Hmm... Mm-hmm, mm-hmm... Ohhh, right."

Just a little curious, he peered over her shoulder, reading her answers.

Then he frowned. He couldn't let this all go unchallenged.

"First off, you don't need to write 'my son, Ma-kun,' every time... Second, every one of these opinions is just ridiculous."

"Oh? It is?"

"We don't need tags on our equipment. They'd just be itchy!"

"I know they can be itchy sometimes, but... Oh! I wonder if that would count as damage!"

"Someone with sensitive skin could well be killed by their own equipment. That *is* a concern. Uh, so about the ramen and family restaurant thing..."

"You've said before that you miss those places!"

"I do! But I don't want them so bad I want to ruin the immersion of the setting. I'm the hero; I can't go around ruining the world! I can manage without

a ramen shop. Still...”

“But you agree the inns should provide slippers, surely.”

“I guess. But...I think people would forget to change and accidentally leave the inn with them on. I wouldn’t, obviously, but these things happen.”

Masato looked surreptitiously down at his feet. “Gah?!” We won’t say what he saw, but he did remember some urgent business and hastily retreated to his room. Three minutes later...

Actually ready this time, Masato was back at the entrance, talking to Mamako again.

“So what I’m saying is: What part of this is hard?”

“About the monsters... I’m just not sure what to put. Monsters are dangerous, so the world is better off without them, right?”

“I think that’s true as a general rule, sure.”

“But there are also non-dangerous monsters in the world. Like the Blins!”

“Blins? ...Oh, I remember now. Right after Wise joined the party, yeah? I’d totally forgotten.”

Their fateful encounter with the Blins. It all started when...

“Wake up. Ma-kun, wake up.”

This whisper brought a realization. He was asleep.

This voice... Mom...?

If his mom was trying to wake him, it was probably past time for him to be up. But he was still so sleepy...

“He’s not waking up... In that case, I think it’s time for a good morning kiss—”

“Wha—?! Don’t do that!!”

Being woken by a kiss from Mom was, to any normal fifteen-year-old boy, entirely out of the question. Enough to shake off all lingering sleepiness and pop his eyes right open.

His mother’s face was *right there*.

Far too youthful a face. Wrinkles? Spots? Not a one. She could tell people she was in high school, and no one would bat an eye. And that face was inches from his.

...Is she really my mother?

She looked so young even her actual son doubted that fact sometimes.

But Mamako was definitely Masato's actual mother.

When she saw he'd woken up, she broke out in a blissful smile, as if that was all it took to make her the happiest woman in the world.

"Hee-hee-hee. You're awake! Good morning, Ma-kun!"

"Oh... Good morning."

"It *is* a good morning. You should get up and get dressed!"

"Right. I'm not a kid anymore, remember? So don't talk to me like that... And like, I appreciate you waking me up and all, but you shouldn't just barge into my room..."

But even as he grumbled, realization hit him.

"...Huh?"

He looked around. This wasn't his room.

Wooden floors, earthen walls, wooden ceiling. There was another bed next to his. The only other furniture was a single table.

This didn't look like a hotel, either—it was like an inn in a fantasy world. And the light shining from the magic lamp only added to that vibe.

He remembered now.

Oh, right. That's right. I'm inside a game, staying at an inn.

Yep, Masato was currently inside a fantasy MMORPG. His computer screen had started glowing and sucked him inside. Somehow. And here he was.

And when he turned to look, there stood his mother. Mamako.

"...You're still here."

"What's that, Ma-kun? Something wrong with Mommy?"

“Nope, never mind.”

No joking. For real. Masato was playing a full-dive game with his mom.

Why was his mom here, too? This appeared to be a scheme concocted by the government, who was managing this game, and Masato had deep misgivings about the whole thing.

But I can't just keep complaining about it. Gotta stay calm.

He was still inside a game. He'd dreamed about this happening. He had to try to enjoy the moment. He took a deep breath, letting his heart grow calm.

He got off the bed and went to the window. Outside was a medieval European landscape, a town built like it belonged on the coast of the Mediterranean.

Waking up to a view like this, inhaling the air—what a great way to start a day in a game world. Or that was the plan anyway.

But when he opened the curtains...

“Huh? It's still dark?”

Dim anyway. The sun hadn't risen yet. In the distance, the sky appeared to be growing slightly lighter, but he could barely see the town at all.

“Uh, Mom? What time is it?”

“About four thirty... Actually, because you overslept, it might be almost five now!”

“That's not oversleeping! Why'd you wake me up this early? This is nuts!”

“But... Ma-kun, have you forgotten?”

“Huh? Forgotten what?”

“You know, at dinner yesterday, we were all talking about the outdoor market. And we decided to have breakfast there!”

“At the market...? Oh, right, yeah. I remember now.”

There was a restaurant there open very early, serving the people who stocked and ran the market stalls. It was similar to the outer market at Tsukiji in Japan—

and open to the public.

They supposedly served an amazing breakfast made from fresh ingredients delivered direct from the source, so it definitely sounded worth trying.

“Got it! Just lemme get ready.”

Masato hastily began changing his equipment. He threw off his pajama top and was about to go for the bottoms, when...

“Oh my! Ma-kun! When did you get so buff?”

“Wait, you’re still here?! Maybe don’t stand around watching your son change, huh?! And quit it with the blushing... Augh?!”

He’d been standing on one leg, his pajama pants half off, and lost his balance.

“Oh, Ma-kun! Look out— Ah!”

Masato staggered forward. Mamako tried to catch him but was less than successful.

They wound up falling onto the bed together. *Poof.*

“Augh! Sorry, Mom! You okay?”

“Yes, Mommy’s fine. What about you, Ma-kun?”

“Yeah, nothing wrong on my end... But there’s *a lot* wrong with our current situation...”

A mother and a son, lying on a bed together. The son on top, wearing nothing but his underwear.

And at that precise moment...

“Mamakooo! How’s it going?”

“Did Masato wake up yet?”

...the door opened, and two other party members came in.

The first was a fifteen-year-old high school Sage in a crimson sorcerer jacket—Wise.

The second was the party’s youngest, a twelve-year-old Traveling Merchant with a trademark overstuffed shoulder bag—Porta.

They both saw Masato and Mamako lying in bed together and froze.

““...Oh...””

Um... So...

Porta buried her face in her hands, as if denying she'd seen anything.

Wise began trembling. Her magic power was rising fast.

“...Look, Masato. Mamako is your *mother*. So her seeing you change or taking baths with you is one thing. She did all that when you were little, y'know?”

“W-wait, Wise! Let me explain!”

“But this is going too far! There are lines humans are not meant to cross! You leave me no choice!”

A hefty magic tome appeared in Wise's hand, and she began to chant.

“I'll have to blast some morals into you! ...*Spara la magia per mirare... Bomba Sfera!*”

“You can't just bomb the inn at the crack of daw— Uuuuughhh!”

She was hardly in any position to lecture him on morals, but his cries of protest were drowned out by the explosion.

And the spell Wise cast was single target, so Mamako was fine. Objects were indestructible, so everything in the room was fine, too. And there was no penalty for attacking party members.

The game world was arranged in her favor.

Only Masato's safety was not guaranteed.

“...*Sigh*... Another unjust punishment...”

“It's your own fault for getting yourself in an easily misunderstood predicament. And besides, if you hadn't chosen today of all days to oversleep, none of this would ever have happened.”

“I'm legitimately sorry for oversleeping! But...Wise, you're the one sharing a room with me. Why didn't *you* wake me up?”

“I tried a bunch of times, and you didn’t get up! That’s why I had to go get Mamako! Or what, you wanted to wake up to me chain casting spells on you?”

“You couldn’t just use a wake-up spell? Besides, you ended up chain casting at me anyway...”

“Then, next time, leave it to me! I’ll use an item that cures sleep and wakes you up gently!”

“Aw, Porta! When you get all earnest like that, nothing else matters!”

Porta looked up at Masato, radiating absolute purity. That was all it took to cleanse his body and mind. To warm his heart. To fill his heart to the brim.

But it didn’t help with the hunger.

“Well, everyone’s here! Let’s get going! Yay!”

Apparently, his mother was even more impatient, and she led the party onward to breakfast.

They left the inn, headed down the main street. This was the peak time for goods being transported; wagons laden with merchandise were going this way and that. Watching them pass, they turned down the road to the commercial district.

With the sun not yet risen, the town had been unusually quiet, but as they drew closer, they could hear the bustle of the market. The hearty shouts that brought in customers during the day were absent, but the thud of wares being unloaded and the rummaging sounds as they were shelved created quite a racket.

Rows of bare-bones shops were dotted throughout the square—your classic outdoor market.

“Right, here we are! Now where’s this restaurant?”

Masato looked around, searching for signs.

“Hey, you there! You here for breakfast?” called a man arranging armor in a stall nearby.

He was a burly fellow. His hands never stopped moving as he spoke, and he

seemed to be in a rather foul mood.

“Fraid all the restaurants are closed today. No food came in. Can’t cook anything, no matter how bad they want to.”

“What? Closed? What happened to the food?”

“It’s a real nuisance... Hup!” The stall owner got the last piece of armor arranged on his display and finally turned to face the party. “The way I hear it, the wagons carrying everything were attacked by goblins, and they made off with all the supplies. Really did a number on us.”

“Goblins?” said Masato, exasperated. “They just *had* to pick today?”

“Seriously, monsters stealing human food? You’ve gotta be kidding me,” lamented Wise.

“I agree! Right now, we got no foodstuffs coming in via land routes. And the groceries are buying up whatever does come in to meet demand, leaving nothing for the restaurants and forcing them all to close.”

“And all the grocery stores will be short on supplies, inflating the prices, ruining household budgets!”

“We were so looking forward to breakfast, and now we can’t have any! I’m so sad!” said Porta.

“Exactly. Leaves us without breakfast, either... Oh, speak of the devil.”

A wagon had arrived at the marketplace looking extremely worse for wear.

The horses appeared uninjured, but the canvas was shredded, and there were arrows left sticking out of the exterior.

The grim-looking driver looked up and stopped the wagon in front of the armor stall. The stall clerk called out, as if addressing an old friend.

“Yo! They got you good, eh, fruit shop man?”

“Yeah, it was a real bad one. Completely out of nowhere. Goblins screaming out of the woods on both sides; took everything I had. All the other food vendors met the same fate.”

These attacks were clearly happening frequently.

Masato took another look at the wagon and wondered if its ragged state could give him some idea how strong these goblin raiders were.

“Oh... M-Ma-kun! Ma-kun! Look!”

“Er... Wait, wh-what the...?”

Mamako had suddenly grabbed his arm, frantically pointing at the back of the wagon.

Masato peered inside, curious as to what had prompted her reaction.

...Uh?

There was a coffin inside.

Masato gulped and turned to the two men.

“Uh, um, hello? About the thing in your wagon...”

“Mm? Oh, this? Probably an adventurer. Got mixed up in the goblin attack and passed away—I figured I’d better haul ’em to a church.”

“I see...”

“Adventurers have it rough! Monsters get them, the death penalty traps them in a coffin, and they can’t move on their own.”

“Town NPCs like us have it easy, in that sense. We can only die during events! Monsters don’t even attack us directly.”

“NPCs who know they’re NPCs sure are something! Totally different worldview.”

“Ha-ha-ha! The difference between players and NPCs is the same as between any other jobs.”

“Yep. For merchants like us, anyone who buys our wares is a customer. They contribute to our profits; we’d even roll out a red carpet for a monster!”

“Th-that would be weird...”

This was a “fun” world where even the NPCs knew they were in a game. That aside...

“Still, going out of your way to haul a corpse... Oh, is there a fee for your

service? Does it turn a profit?”

“No, no, nothing like that. The corpse here is a nun. Didn’t seem like the friendliest sort, but pretty enough—figured it wouldn’t do me any harm to take care of her.”

At this point, things started sounding familiar. Could it be...?

Masato glanced at the others and saw the same strained smile on every face. Clearly, they were all thinking the same thing. That clinched it.

“Uh, sorry... Can we take a peek inside?”

“Oh, go right ahead. The lady in here is just unable to move because her HP hit zero, but she’s pretty enough to look at!”

Permission granted, Masato clambered into the wagon.

He slid the coffin lid aside, checking the contents...

“...Zzzz...”

...and, as promised, he found a nun. A beautiful woman with long black hair and not an ounce of “friendly” anywhere to be found.

Someone the party knew only too well, deep in a slumber far from eternal.

They took the coffin from the fruit seller and hauled it to a corner of the market.

Wise summoned her hefty tome and cast a spell.

“My turn to contribute! ...*Spara la magia per mirare... Rianimato!*”

The revival spell activated. The light of life poured down upon her, and the coffin dissipated around the immobile body...

...and *she* emerged.

“Good morning, everyone. I can infoorm you that I am Shiraaase, the mysterious nun. I shall not, however, infoorm you of anything specific about what is so mysterious.”

The expressionless woman behind this terrible pun called herself Shiraaase,

though her real name was Masumi Shirase.

She was the person who had brought Masato and Mamako into the game. In the real world, she was an External Surveyor with the Cabinet Office Policy Division (Department of Policy on Cohesive Society), so this mysterious nun's true identity wasn't particularly mysterious at all.

Shiraaase looked around and then clasped her hands together in prayer.

"It seems we are bound together by fate. Once again, I must thank you for reviving me."

"This always happens. At least sixty percent of the coffins we find have you inside. The other forty percent have Wise."

"Hey! I haven't died all *that* much! I haven't even died at all!!"

"But if you've appeared like this, there must be something going on. Is this connected with the goblin attacks on the food wagons?"

"Oh, you're already aware? Then I shall infoorm you of the particulars. First, I should explain the root cause—this is a setting error by management."

"A setting error?"

Shiraaase bowed her head low.

"There is a large forest on the road from Catharn. A quest boss was placed there—and a band of goblins."

"Hmm."

"To ensure that these goblins were properly villainous and a target for extermination, we set them to conduct raids. They were designed to attack adventurers and steal their equipment and valuables."

"...But you got that setting wrong?"

"It seems we did. They began unexpectedly attacking not just adventurers, but also the wagons carrying food supplies."

Get it together, Management! Your players deserve better!

Masato and Wise communicated this with a pair of meaningful glares.

But the management team member before them remained unperturbed. She always did.

“Naturally, we’d love to patch it, but unfortunately, management has their hands full with much more pressing issues. It may be a while before anyone can get around to it.”

“So you’re just leaving it?” asked Masato.

“It’s disrupting people’s lives here! You can’t just do nothing!” protested Wise.

“Your anger is entirely justified. However, as it is possible to handle this matter in-game, the issue was deemed low priority.”

“In-game? You mean a system-side fix from here?”

“No, no, not at all. Once exterminated, the goblins here will not respawn for some time. In other words...”

“Oh, I get it. As long as someone wipes them out, you’ll buy yourself enough time to make the bug fix. And that someone is...”

“Us!” Mamako cried, breaking her silence.

Next to her, Wise and Porta nodded emphatically.

Masato had no objections, so the deal was struck.

“Shiraaase, mind if we handle this?”

“Please do. I’ll set this matter up as an emergency quest. And prepare an appropriate reward. Take care!”

“Right... Then let’s go exterminate these vicious food-stealing monsters that killed Shiraaase!”

““““Yeah!””””

But just as their righteousness reached its peak...

“What? Killed me? No, no, my death was unrelated to the goblins.”

“Huh...?”

“Actually, as I was investigating the scene, I felt suddenly thirsty. I then

accidentally drank a poison-based attack item.”

“Uh...”

“And unfortunately, I had no antidotes with me. The poison did damage over time and eventually killed me. Even Shiraaase is capable of such comedic blunders, ho-ho-ho.”

“Uh, right, then. Um... A-anyway, let’s get going...”

“““Y-yeah...”””

Mm. Well. The emergency quest was underway.

The fruit seller heard they were after the goblins and volunteered to guide them to the location. Masato’s party sat in the back of the man’s wagon, eating a makeshift breakfast out of the few apples and bananas that had survived the attack. It was a bumpy ride.

But it didn’t take them long to reach the location. The fruit seller gave them a hearty shout of encouragement, waved them on, and they headed into battle.

“...This sure is a forest.”

Indeed. Everywhere they looked, they saw nothing but trees.

Following an animal trail, they moved rapidly forward.

“Seems pretty big... I hope we can find the goblins...”

“This better not be some low-spawn rate crap. That always pisses me off,” said Wise.

“Seriously! Nothing more stressful than a special boss that only appears X percent of the time. Especially the ones you bump into by surprise and get your ass handed to you before you realize what you’re fighting.”

“Then you grind your level and get all your equipment ready and can’t get the asshole to spawn again and just keep looping through until your head hurts.”

“Yeah, what’s with that crap? Are they programmed so they know you aren’t ready?”

“Like, are they specifically meant to kill you on your first encounter? Bad design, either way.”

“Um... Porta, dear? What are Ma-kun and Wise talking about?”

“Just normal game stuff!”

Mamako didn’t know much about games and was totally lost.

The party continued pressing on through the forest.

“...Oh, enemy sighted!” Porta cried. Her big round eyes had the Appraise skill, so she spotted the enemy first.

Ferocious wolves, giant ants and beetles, poisonous caterpillars—an assortment of standard forest foes.

“Sadly, not the quest target, but might as well take ’em out!”

“Roger that! I’ll just chain cast—”

“Mommy’s gonna do her best!” *Tup-tup-tup-tup!*

“Wha—?! Mamako, you’re too fast!!”

Mamako had the highest initiative in the party, so she always went first.

In her right hand, the crimson-bladed Holy Sword of Mother Earth—Terra di Madre.

In her left hand, the deep-blue-bladed Holy Sword of Mother Ocean—Altura.

Two holy swords, each unleashing powerful attacks.

“Here’s Mommy’s attack! ...Hyah!”

Mamako swung Terra di Madre, and countless rock spikes shot out of the ground, piercing the pack of monsters.

“Gyahrr?!” “Gah-gah-gah?!” “Igyyyyy?!”

Her AOE attack struck home. The monsters crumbled, their bodies turning to dust.

But the bug monsters, with their strong shells, remained alive.

Then...

“One more! ...Hyah!”

Mamako swung Altura, and a stream of water appeared where the blade passed, forming bullets of water, which launched themselves at all targets.

“Clck-clck-clck?!” “Baghh!” “MERCILESS!”

The monsters that withstood the first attack were easily reduced to ash, and the battle was done.

The monsters were defeated!

“Look, look, Ma-kun! Mommy did it!”

“Yeah, you sure did...”

His mother was strong. Her firepower was quite literally out of this world.

The holy swords she dual-wielded each boasted top-class attack stats, even for event-exclusive items. Extremely rare. And each did an AOE attack that split damage among all foes—pretty impressive specs.

Naturally, Masato had a holy sword himself and was totally capable of fighting, but his sword was specialized against flying enemies, so he struggled against certain foes—but that wasn’t really the problem, was it?

He sighed. *Come on... You know this is how things are. Just accept it.*

Masato’s mother had two-hit multi-target attacks. Overwhelming DPS.

That was just a fact. *Sniffle.*

No, he wasn’t crying. Not a tear to be seen. He remained strong.

But just as they were about to resume their search for the goblins...

“...Oh? Who is that child?” Mamako asked, pointing. The others turned to look.

They saw a kid a short distance away between the trees. This kid was even smaller than Porta, and their back was to the party, messy hair swaying as they trotted away.

Then the kid broke into a run, moving swiftly into the depths of the forest.

“What’s a child doing here...? Based on the clothes, that’s gotta be a village

kid...but there aren't any towns nearby."

"This forest is far too dangerous for a child on their own! Mommy's going to go talk to them!" She dashed off.

"Whoa, wait! Don't run off alone! Argh! Everyone, after them!"

Mamako's maternal propulsion had left them all chasing after her again.

Their target was a child. They should have easily caught up—but this hope proved unfounded.

Unused to the uneven forest footing, the party struggled to maintain any real speed.

Meanwhile, the kid clearly knew the place well and moved steadily forward.

"Hello! Little one! Will you wait a moment?" Mamako called.

"Yo! Wait up! We won't hurt you!" Masato tried.

But the kid never even glanced back.

The party couldn't manage to keep up with the child, but they were at least able to maintain their distance. For a while, this pattern held.

Masato was beginning to have doubts. This didn't feel right.

...Weird.

He was certain now. He'd better step in and handle things before it was too late.

"Guys, stop. I wanna check on something. Over here."

They stopped running and took shelter behind a tree.

Mamako quietly placed herself right next to Masato, her large, fluffy, soft *things* pressed against his arm, which would have been nice if she wasn't his mom.

Paying this any attention would turn the world against him, so he pretended it wasn't happening.

"Um, Ma-kun? I'm not sure why we're playing hide-and-seek."

"We're not. Keep quiet. Wait to see how they respond."

The group waited silently with bated breath. And then...

...the kid came back.

For the first time, they got a look at the kid's face...and it wasn't human.

Pallid skin, a mouth split all the way to the ears—this kid looked evil. And if it knew how to trick humans...

"That's a goblin," Masato muttered.

He glanced at his party, and Wise and Porta nodded in agreement.

Only the owner of the two warm mounds squishing against his arm seemed to be having trouble keeping up.

"Um, Ma-kun, that *is* an unusual-looking child. I do hate to be rude, but...their face is rather frightening!" *Squish, squish, squish.*

"You're not being rude— That's a monster. A goblin."

"Goodness, a monster? That child? Are you sure, Ma-kun?" *Squish.*

"I am. Also, get off! You need to be more in tune with your child's suffering!"

He was far too old for such prolonged contact.

"So this whole chase was a trap. If we'd kept following, it would've led us right into an ambush—the rest of the goblins would have attacked from all sides."

The goblin disguised as a child was bait. It was currently looking for something. Searching for its prey—Masato's party.

It was this goblin's job to lead the others into the ambush, but it couldn't do that now.

Keeping a close eye on the direction it was looking, the party quietly discussed their plan of action.

"Now, since Mom's caught up with the rest of us, what next? We could elect to jump into the ambush and just clean up all the goblins as they attack. After all, we've got..."

"Me, the ultimate Sage!" Wise boasted, grinning.

“Uh, sure, your magic is great. But...”

Their main DPS was definitely Mamako.

Her firepower was beyond all doubt. With Mamako on their side, victory was assured.

“Don’t worry. We can do this. Mom and I can handle anything.”

“Hey! Wait! What about me?!”

“...Yes,” Mamako said. “A mother and child working together can accomplish anything! Are you okay with that, Porta?”

“I am! I’ll follow you anywhere!”

“What about me?!”

“Yeah, yeah, Wise, we can count on you, too,” said Masato. “So...shall we?”

Everyone nodded.

They knew full well it was a trap. So there was no need to play things by the enemy script.

Having figured out their plan, Masato’s party crept stealthily forward, hiding behind the trees, slowly following the bait goblin.

Good, good, it hasn’t noticed... Just follow the plan...

Their plan was simple. Wait until the bait goblin gave up and went home, then follow it and attack once it met up with the rest of the horde.

If they could keep it from noticing them, and it led them to the other goblins, they were certain to win...

.....Hmm. It stopped.

The goblin in front of them had come to a halt. Masato quietly raised a hand, signaling the others to stop.

The bait goblin looked around, letting out a shrill cry.

Next, goblin after goblin began pouring out of the underbrush. Ten in all. Each

much larger than the bait one.

Witnessing this, Mamako's whispering grew tense.

"Ma-kun, these ones are as big as grown-up humans! I don't think they're 5-blins. They're more like 7-blins...maybe even 8-blins!"

"The 'go' in goblin isn't the same as the number five in Japanese, Mom."

Mamako knew little about fantasy settings, and even basic terms could easily get transformed into awful puns.

Masato recovered, carefully observing their enemy.

All the new goblins were armed. Some had swords, some bows, some even had magic tomes. It wasn't clear how skilled they were, but these were clearly goblins specialized in their respective jobs.

And their equipment was clearly every bit as good as what human adventurers carried. They had full kits of top-tier stuff.

"These are definitely the goblins that steal equipment...which makes them tough."

If they were able to attack adventures to steal their gear, they must be strong enough to win in a fight.

If they treated them like your average trash mobs, they could well have the tables turned on them. It was important to be careful.

So of course...

"Then let's take them out! Hyah! Hyah! Yaaay!"

"What the—? Wait, Mom?! Don't—!"

With no warning whatsoever, Mamako charged out of the underbrush, brandishing her swords.

"Giigiii!"

The first goblin to spot her let out a shriek.

Instantly, a huge swarm of heavily armed goblins poured out of the underbrush. There were more than thirty of them. Mamako was completely

surrounded.

“O-oh my...”

“Gah... Damn, they got us! It was a double ambush!”

“Wh-wh-wh-what do we do now?! Mama’s surrounded by goblins!”

“These guys are slick! But they’re still just goblins. My magic can take care of them!”

The first to strike would win. Wise pulled out her tome and got ready to fight.

But before Wise could start her chant, a group of goblins in matching robes came leaping out.

First attack: goblin mage squad.

...Grind-grind-grind-grind-grind-grind-grind...

The goblin mages began grinding their teeth together. A sickening sound that produced sound waves, affecting all who heard it.

Masato was unaffected. Mamako was unaffected. Porta was unaffected.

Wise’s magic was sealed.

“...Heh. *Really* slick.”

Wise retreated behind the others. Once she was a safe distance back, she threw her tome at the ground as hard as she could, then flopped down, using it as a pillow for a sulk nap.

What was a mage with her magic sealed? That’s right! Baggage.

“Sheesh, you’re completely useless... Although, I guess we should be used to it by now!”

This was who Wise was.

“Then the two of us will have to do it all! Come on, Mom! You and me together... Or hey, you could even let me steal the limelight for—!”

“Leave it to Mommy!” *Tup-tup-tup-tup-tnk!*

“And Mom leaves me behind and runs out ahead *again!*”

Mamako charged in. Was the battle already over?

But no—next came the goblin mage squad's second attack!

"Yagyu!" "Zurunara!" "Gouiu!" "Gaini!" "Jajanze!"

Unfamiliar chants echoed in all directions.

Masato was unaffected. Wise was unaffected. Porta was unaffected.

Mamako's clothing began to fall off.

"Huh? ...Whaaat?! My armor's coming off on its own! Why?!"

The goblin mages had used a spell that lowered the target's defense. Which meant...

The elbow guard on Mamako's arm slid off and twirled through the air. The waist guard around her hips came undone, flying away and landing on the ground nearby.

The goblins dashed forward, aiming for Mamako's dropped equipment. Specifically, goblin bandits—of course they were after her armor.

"Crap! Mom's armor!"

"Don't worry! Leave it to me! Item management is my job!"

And with that, Porta ran forward, collecting each piece of Mamako's armor before the goblins could get to it. Like a squirrel gathering nuts.

And thanks to Porta's adorable squirrel dash, the worst outcome was averted.

Now they just had to defeat their targets.

"All right! Now it's finally my turn! Thanks to me, the day is sav—"

"Um, Ma-kun? Do you have a minute?"

"What, Mom?! My big moment's coming up here! Make it snappy!"

"Okay, snappy... Well, um, they've captured me."

"...Hurrr?"

Even he wasn't sure what that noise was supposed to be. Masato turned around.

He found Mamako bound hand and foot, being hauled away by several goblins.

Uh...

“The hell?! They weren’t after the equipment but its *contents*?!”

“Ohhhh noooo! Mama!!”

“Hey, what’s going on here?!”

With Mamako in tow, the goblins sped off to the forest depths. The rest of the party hastily gave chase.

When goblins wanted to, they could move pretty fast. Masato and crew lost sight of them almost immediately.

But they couldn’t just give up. They kept running, hoping they were going in the right direction.

Eventually, they saw a wooden arch ahead—like a gate.

“...What’s that?”

They passed through the gate and found...more forest. But each of the massive trees had been hollowed out, and dry grass was placed inside, forming beds.

The stream flowing past had a simple bridge crossing it, and there were buckets on the bank for scooping water. Primitive but clear signs of civilization.

“Is this...the goblin settlement?”

“Seems like it. Seriously, a settlement? For *goblins*? The nerve!”

“Er, um! We really need to find Mama!”

“Yeah, you’re right, Porta. If the goblins live here, then Mom must be... Uh, what’s that?”

Masato had found a large building at the back of the settlement.

As they drew closer, it was clearly more of a fort than a house. Walls and ceiling made of logs—pretty sturdy construction.

There was a fence made of logs across the gate, like they were ready for a fight.

But there were no guards anywhere.

“This place...seems like there should be a boss waiting for us, but I’m not even seeing any minions...”

“Maybe they’re all hiding again! I’m worried they are!”

“Yeah, I agree with Porta. This smells like an ambush.”

“Definitely. Which brings me to my point...”

“Mm? What?”

“If this is a trap, we don’t, like, need to rush into it, do we?”

Wise stopped and looked at him.

“Think about it. Mamako may have lost her armor, but she still has her weapons, right? So she can totally handle this on her own. I mean, it’s Mamako.”

“Oh...true. Mom’s ridiculous. My job might be Hero, but she’s way stronger than me. Even saying that makes me want to cry, but...”

“That’ll make me start crying, too. Pfft.”

“Hey, that sounds more like a laugh! ...Anyway, I feel like this’ll sort itself out if we just wait a bit. But still, we should at least try to save her. She is my mom.”

“Yeah, she sure is.”

“And I feel like kids oughta look after their parents sometimes.”

Masato gritted his teeth and turned to face the others.

“I know this is reckless, but please. I need your help.”

“Okay! I’ll do whatever I can!”

“You got it! Now let’s go! ...Also, like, thinking about it? Goblins hauling a woman back to their home never ends well. You know what I mean, right?”

“Yo, don’t put ideas in my head!”

This isn't that kind of game! At all!

Telling himself that, Masato turned to rush into the gate. But then— “...Oh, not there...! Don't touch that... Ah! Leave that alone!”

—he heard a voice from inside.

A voice he would know anywhere.

“That was Mom's voice!”

“Yes! Definitely Mama! ...She sounded a little sad...”

“Are we too late?!”

“Hell no, we aren't! Argh... Mom?!”

If they ran in, would his mom be...? No! It couldn't be! That wasn't happening! No way!

Masato vaulted over the fence and kicked in the door to the fort.

“Mom! Are you okay?!”

He burst inside. It was a single large room, no interior walls at all.

Mamako was surrounded by goblins.

“Oh, Ma-kun! You came!”

She had an apron over her dress and was behind a counter, slicing vegetables with Terra di Madre.

Next to her was a large cauldron, bubbling away. She was watering the soup down a little with a stream from Altura.

“Uh... This is... *What* is this, exactly? What are you using those holy swords for?”

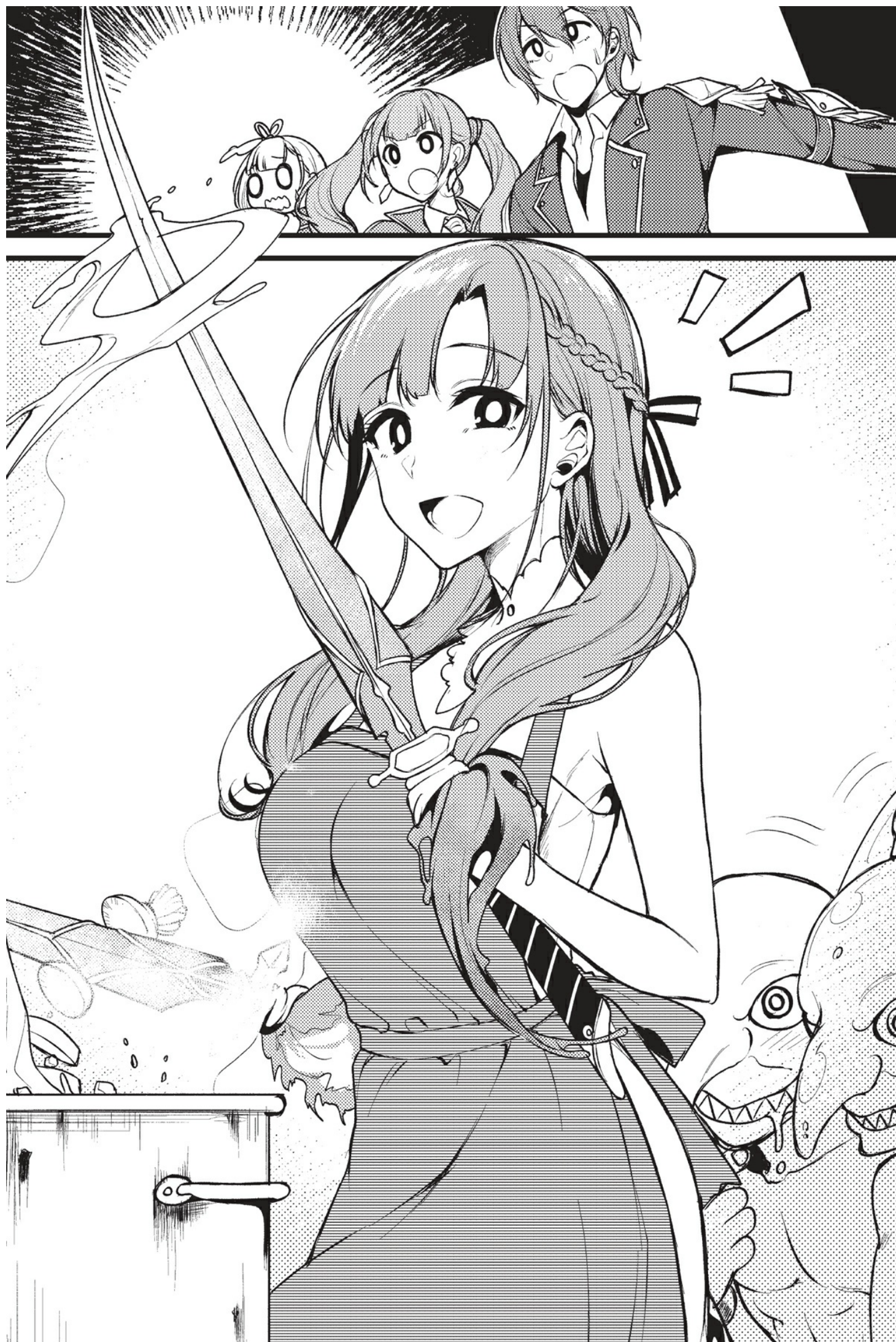
“What else? I'm cooking!”

“Gyawawa!” “Gyaauuu!” “Gyuwawa?”

“Oh, now, now! I said don't! Like I told you, once they're done, they'll float to the top, so leave them be. Leave that meat alone! It cooks fast, so that's the last step.”

“Er... So that’s what you were talking about just now...?”

“Perfect timing, Ma-kun. Would you taste test this?”



She held out a small dish with a spoonful of the soup in it. Might as well try it.

“...Uh, sure, I guess.”

That was the only reply he could muster.

In the clearing outside the fort, they piled stones to the right height and laid planks out on top of those.

The cauldron was in the center, perfectly stewed vegetables inside. Bowls were handed out, and lines formed.

The seating arrangement was a goblin, a goblin, goblin goblin goblin, Wise, Masato, Mamako, Porta, and another goblin goblin goblin.

“Okay, everyone! Hands together, and... Thanks for the food!”

“““Th-thanks for the food...”””

“Gyawawa!” “Gigii!” “Gyuwa!”

The goblin’s guttural cries sounded over lunch.

Terrifying visages tearing into the vegetable stew all around them, Masato quietly asked, “So...what’s going on?”

“Well, I think it’s quite obvious. The food’s ready, so we’re all eating together!”

“That’s not... I mean, why is that even an option in the first place?”

“About that... This here is the Boss Blin.”

Mamako made an introductory hand wave in the direction of a giant goblin sitting (yet, still looming) directly behind them. Built like a pro wrestler, this was less a 5-blin than an 11-blin, maybe even a 12-blin. Which were still goblins.

As for what the boss goblin had to say:

“Gugyagyagyaa! Gugya! Gugaaa!”

“You see?”

“Uh, no, that made no sense. Can you understand him?”

“I get the general idea.”

“You seriously baffle me sometimes, Mom...”

“Pfft, I bet it’s just some sort of mom support skill. Hardly a surprise at this point.”

“Yes! I’m positive that Mama can do literally anything!”

Mothers in this game had been supplied with a seemingly infinite stream of support effects. Wise and Porta were probably right on the money. Moving right along...

“Then let Mommy explain. You see, the Blins don’t know how to cook properly, so they asked Mommy to teach them how.”

“But...all the food here was stolen from the merchants’ wagons. I dunno if we should be cooking and eating that...”

“That is true... But they all seemed hungry, so I felt sorry for them.”

“Is that all it takes?”

“And we talked it out! They promised not to do anything else bad.”

“Er...no, no, it can’t be that easy.”

The goblins here were all designed to be enemies inside a game.

Their entire purpose was to do bad things! They’d been programmed that way! Mamako’s lecture couldn’t fix that!

But when he looked around at the goblins, they were all nodding. Mamako was right. They were good now. They all looked very sincere.

“Uh... I think my mom’s managed to make a system-side change... purely through the power of her momdom.”

“Mom support skills, get over it.”

“Mama can do anything! I’m sure of it!”

“*Sigh...* Yeah, I guess it’s high time I got used to it. Then I guess Mom reconfigured them all into good goblins.”

Just one problem.

“But just because we’re cool with that doesn’t mean the merchants they preyed on will be. What should we do about that?”

“Oh, don’t worry. I’m sure it’ll work out. After all—they’re merchants.”

Mamako seemed very confident.

The next day, at dawn, as the sky to the east was beginning to brighten...

A large number of wagons were gathered along the road through the forest, each operated by a merchant who’d been the victim of goblin attacks. Many of the wagons still bore the marks of battle.

The merchants themselves still remembered the attacks vividly. They all looked less than pleased to be here.

And the goblin pack stood before them, the boss goblin at the head. They all bowed in unison.

“““““Gugyagyagya!”””””

Of course, the merchants had no idea what they’d said, so they just frowned.

Interpretation was clearly required. Mamako stepped up beside the goblins, explaining.

“They all said they’re very sorry. Will you please accept their apology? Consider it a favor for me.”

“Uh, well... I did sort of get that it was an apology, but...”

“But that doesn’t erase what they’ve done!”

“If you can talk to them, let’s talk about recouping our losses! If they wanna do business, money talks.”

“I’m aware of that. Which is why...”

Mamako glanced at the goblins.

The goblins nodded and brought a number of wooden boxes forward from the forest, lining them up in front of the merchants.

Cautiously, the merchants held their lanterns out, illuminating the insides.

“Wh-whoa! This box is filled with matsutake mushrooms!”

“This one has white truffles!”

“And this one has saffron! So much saffron!”

Just as a ballpark figure:

It varies by size, but a single matsutake averages about ten thousand yen. One of the three rarest mushrooms in the world, white truffles can haul fifty thousand per one hundred grams. And saffron, a popular spice, can be worth eighty thousand yen for that same amount.

The value within the game was the same as within Japan.

Mamako gave the stunned merchants a gentle smile.

“They gathered all these within the forest and are offering them to you by way of apology... With this much, you should be out of the red, right?”

“Well, of course! Not only does it wipe the slate clean, we stand to make a fortune!” one merchant said—shiftily.

“You there! Don’t sneak them in your pocket! We’re splitting them in proportion to our losses!”

“If this is their apology, then consider it accepted! The goblins and I are even! ...By the way, little lady, a word?”

“Yes?”

“Is it possible to arrange for regular trades between the products we carry and the treasures gathered within this forest? We’d love to set up an arrangement like that.”

“Of course it is! But with one condition.”

“Condition?”

“The goblins would like to continue living in the forest. They promise not to do anything else bad. I know they’re monsters, but if we could arrange it so they aren’t exterminated... What do you say?”

The merchants thought about this.

“Hmm... We’d be leaving monsters running wild... But wait. If there are goblins living here, then it’s less likely that humans will enter the forest and steal all the treasures within...”

Sensing profits, the merchants rubbed their hands together.

“It’s a deal! We’ll accept their condition. On our pride as merchants, we’ll protect this arrangement with our lives.”

“Thank you. It’s such a help.”

“If we could just get this contract signed...”

“Hey! No cutting the rest of us out!”

“We all want in on this! Here! My contract!”

The merchants all produced documents, flocking around Mamako. It was quite the to-do.

Meanwhile, the rest of the party was watching, bemused.

“...I guess that worked out?”

“Nice work, Mamako! You’ve earned my respect.”

“Mama’s amazing! Amaaaazing!”

“Indeed, she is.”

“Wait, that was one too many responses...”

Standing next to Masato, Wise, and Porta was the mysterious nun, Shiraaase.

A basket full of the forest’s bounty beneath each arm, she appeared pleased with the quest’s completion.

“This was certainly not the outcome I expected, but...I am impressed. Mamako does it again! I hope she’ll continue helping us resolve any issues we’ve been unable to take care of.”

“No, wait... That’s not the main goal here!”

“Oh, I nearly forgot. Of course, you and your mother should enjoy your adventures together, first and foremost. This is the reward for quest completion. Enjoy them together!”

“Ah, thanks... You just totally gathered these on the spot, huh? And the other one’s for personal use?”

Masato accepted a basket full of matsutake and truffles. He knew these were valuable, but it wasn’t exactly a thrilling reward.

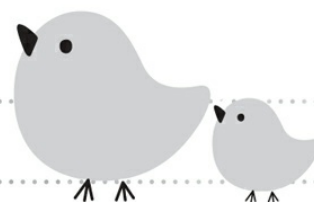
Either way, the quest was complete.

“Sheesh... Adventuring with my mom? It’s more like I’m being dragged around in her wake.”

But Masato was starting to feel like that wasn’t so bad.

Mom Consultation Forum 1

Mama's BBS



Question

Submitted by: SWORDMASTAR



I'm a passing swordsman. I've heard Mamako Oosuki tamed some monsters. I don't even know what that means. How is that possible?

Answer

MAMAKO



Oh, a question on the Mom Consultation Forum!
And the question's from someone named SwordMastar...
Sword, "Ma," and a bright, shining star...
It must be Ma-kun!

MASATO

Wha—? How'd you know? You saw right through my
clever ruse... A-anyway, answer the question!



MAMAKO



Mm, well... How should I put this? I think if you can talk
and communicate your feelings like we did with the
Blins, you can make friends with anyone!

MASATO

You're already being unreasonable...and stop calling
them Blins! Please, the species is called *goblins*! It's not
that hard to understand!



Chapter 2 Do You Love Your Mom-Turned-Homeroom Teacher?

Please let us know your opinions on combat difficulty.

I received wonderful weapons at the start, so I've had no trouble. The children say they want to fight tougher foes, but I think things are perfect the way they are now.

Please let us know your opinions on skills and magic.

I'd like to learn more skills that will delight the children.

If there are any skills or magic you'd like us to add, please list them here.

Loving Family Jump: a skill to jump very high with your child

Loving Family Dash: a skill to run very fast with your child in a three-legged race
Loving Family Stroll: a skill to take a walk and talk with your child
Loving Family Cooking: a skill to cook and eat with your child

Loving Family Cleaning: a skill to clean with your child and then relax in the clean room together
Loving Family Sing-Along: a skill to stand next to your child and sing together
Loving Family Loving: a skill to get along perfectly with your child
You can never have too many ultimate family-oriented moves, in my opinion!

Please let us know your opinions on the design of the fields and dungeons.

No matter where we go, we can find restrooms tucked away somewhere, which is such a relief on any adventure. If there were also shower rooms and kitchens, I'm sure our adventures would be even more comfortable.

Please let us know your opinions on quests.

The children like to shorten *quests* to q's. The more they say q's, the more I want to tell them to mind their p's and q's.

Part of me thinks saying that would be funny, but perhaps I'd better quit while I'm ahead.

Please let us know your opinions on NPCs.

We've met NPC students who weren't even complete—they didn't have names, and their faces were just made of symbols!

I suppose these things happen, but it was very sad, so I hope you will be able to finish everyone soon.

Midday. In the shade of a few trees in the center of a vast field, the party was relaxing, the remains of their lunch spread out around them.

The girls had been chattering away, but eventually they'd all drifted off to sleep. "...So heavy... Unghhh..." The one dressed in red was making odd noises, possibly because the other two were using her as a pillow. But they were sleeping more or less peacefully.

"A nap, huh? Right! I can play that game, too."

Feeling weirdly competitive, Masato was just about to join the napping girls, when...

"You're sleepy, too, Ma-kun? Then... Here, go ahead! Right over here!"

...Mamako's lap swiftly appeared where he was trying to lay his head, so Masato was forced to grunt, apply the full force of his abs, and reverse momentum back into a sit-up. No adolescent boy was capable of napping on his mother's lap.

"Oh, hey! I'm not feeling sleepy at all! I'm actually wide awake!"

"Ma-kun, you're so silly! Go right ahead! Any time you want to, Mommy is right here."

She seemed disinclined to give him any space today.

Mamako had her pop-up window screen open and was tapping away with one finger, typing something. Seemed like she was still working on that survey from this morning.

Masato glanced over her answers, and his brows slammed together. What she'd written was horrific.

“Every one of those ultimate co-op moves is a huge no from me! Especially Loving Family Loving, the purpose of which entirely escapes me. Please don’t suggest that!”

“Hee-hee! Loving Family Loving is for a Loving Family aiming to be more Loving to get even more Loving by Lovingly increasing their Loving Family nature! When I put it like that, it just writes itself!”

“Yeah, maybe if the most annoying person ever is writing it.”

Perhaps that was just a mom thing—or at least a Mamako thing. The fact that she really thought like this was what made it so terrifying.

“I’d object to the quest answer, too, but...more importantly, these NPC students you mentioned are from that school, right?”

“Yes, they are. You remembered!”

“Well, yeah. We weren’t there long, but we were technically classmates...”

“Mommy was there, too! Teaching, learning—it was so educational!”

“And I’m extremely worried that they’re consequently screwed for life.”

Remembering their time at the Gioco Accademia School for Adventurers always gave Masato a headache.

They’d had a female instructor.

Long beautiful legs emerging from a tight skirt.

A bountiful bosom that swayed as she walked, seemingly about to pop the buttons on her blouse, yet her gait was so light it was like she didn’t even care.

As she stepped into the classroom, she pushed her fake glasses up the bridge of her nose and called out in a syrupy voice...

“Morning, everyone! We’re going to learn so much today!”

““““Yay! Looking forward to it! Thank you!!”””””

Yessss! Here we go! A young, beautiful female teacher! Hooray! A round of applause from every student. This female teacher’s name? Mamako Oosuki.

Actual mother to Masato Oosuki, who was clutching his head and moaning

aloud.

“Why...why is my mother teaching? How did this even happen?”

The answer was obvious.

According to Wise, the girl to Masato's right—a smug-looking high school Sage with curly pigtails wearing a crimson sorcerer's jacket: “Why? Obviously, because the real teacher, Mr. Burly, is out sick, duh.”

This was true.

According to Medhi, the girl to Masato's left—a Cleric with grades as good as her looks, a healer tunic as pure white as her insides weren't, and your classic angelic smile: “He ate too much at our farewell party. Mr. Burly couldn't stop eating Mamako's cooking.”

This was also true.

According to Porta, the girl behind Masato—a twelve-year-old Traveling Merchant overflowing with youth and sprightliness, clutching a large trademark shoulder bag, her eyes gleaming: “*It wasn't Mama's* fault, but she took responsibility and agreed to teach in his place! That's why Mama's the teacher! Professor Mama!”

True, again. And thus, the start of their next adventure had been postponed.

They were back at Gioco Accademia. And Mamako was teacher for a day.

“Argh... Nobody even warned me... I'm only here because they told me they'd give out free points to graduates...”

“We're still getting those once class is over; just pay attention! She's starting.”

While her student son was in the pits of despair, his mind on the brink of death, homeroom began.

Ms. Mamako stood at the podium, smiling sweetly.

“Then let's take attendance! If I call your name, make sure to answer loud and clear! First...”

Ms. Mamako looked down at the attendance book, preparing to call a name.

“O-oh? There aren't any names written here! What now...?”

“Ms. Mamako! We’re all rushed NPCs, so we weren’t given names!”

“So just call out our seat numbers!”

“O-oh my! Is that true? Then...”

The NPC students were wearing sailor uniforms or stiff-collared military-style jackets, but not only had they not been given names, their faces were slapped together with ASCII art. “Um, number one.” “Here!” “Number two.” “Heeere!” This went on a bit.

Eventually, she got around to...

“Okay, next... Masato!” Ms. Mamako called, looking rather grim.

But Masato was busy yawning. “How long is this gonna take?” he muttered.

“Masato, Masato!” “Geez, just answer!” What was he doing? Couldn’t he hear?

Then it finally hit him.

“O-oh? Masato? You mean me?”

“Yes, I do. Who else?”

“R-right... Yeah... You never call me by my name, Mom, so I didn’t realize...”

“Today I’m your teacher. It would be highly unprofessional to call a student by their nickname! Let’s try this again, shall we?”

In the classroom, they might have been mother and son, but they were also teacher and student. Ms. Mamako was taking this teacher-for-a-day thing seriously.

So Ms. Mamako tried to call his name again, but...

“Okay! Masa...Ma...Ma... Oh, I feel dizzy...” *Swoon.*

Ms. Mamako turned pale and crouched down. She looked quite ill.

“Whoa, Mom?!”

“I-I’m fine! I’m fine...”

“You don’t look fine! What’s wrong?!”

“Y-you see, Mo—your teacher has this little quirk.”

“A quirk?! Since when?! What sort of quirk?”

“Your teacher will die if she doesn’t call you Ma-kun!”

“Huh? Where’d that come from?”

Ms. Mamako’s quirk meant calling Masato anything other than Ma-kun was fatal!

Suffering from this cruel twist of fate, yet desperately trying to be a proper teacher, impressed Wise, Medhi, and Porta so much that they ran to her with tears in their eyes.

“Ms. Mamako! Hang in there! You’re pushing yourself too hard!”

“Trying to be the best teacher you can as long as you’re in the classroom is certainly admirable, but it’s not worth risking your life over! We don’t want to lose our teacher!”

“Just call Masato what you always do, Professor Mama! Don’t force it!”

Following their lead, the rest of the class began shouting “Ms. Mamako!” “Hang in there!” “Don’t die!” They gathered around Ms. Mamako, not a dry eye present.

“Wise, Medhi, Porta, class... You’re right. I shouldn’t force myself. Thank you for your concern.”

Wise helped her up, and Ms. Mamako gazed at each NPC student in turn.

Then she faced Masato and smiled.

“In which case... Ma-kun!”

Her health was instantly restored! Ms. Mamako was feeling great! Her students cried tears of joy! Thank goodness! The classroom teacher should be smiling! Hooray!

While that was going on...

One student was unable to join in: Masato.

“Uh... What is this two-bit Oscar-bait school drama? Should I be mocking you

openly? Is that my role here?”

Mamako was a given, but for all the girls to take her side?

That left Masato all alone.

Masato was in for a very tough day.

Once attendance was complete, homeroom was over.

First period began immediately. Once again, the teacher at the podium was Ms. Mamako.

“Okay, let’s get started! First period is game basics. Let’s all apply ourselves!”

Ms. Mamako opened the textbook to begin her lecture...or so they thought.

Instead, she froze up, staring blankly at the page.

“O-oh my... Um...”

“Mm? What’s wrong, Mom—I mean...Ms. Mamako?”

“N-no, no... It’s nothing. I’m fine. Momm—I mean, your teacher is fine. Er... Account creation... First obtain a game ID... ID? What’s an ID...? Is it a new disc type like a CD or an MD?”

Presumably, Ms. Mamako was looking at information about how to start playing an online game.

But she seemed to understand almost none of it. She was stumbling over the most basic jargon.

Of course she is. Mom doesn’t know anything about online games.

Ms. Mamako was originally a housewife. This was definitely not her field.

But if the textbook didn’t make any sense to her...

“Um... A-anyway, this is about how to start playing games. In which case... I know!”

Ms. Mamako abruptly closed the textbook and turned to the class.

“Let me ask you all a question,” she said. “Have any of you ever played a

game with your mothers? Everyone who has, raise your hand!"

No one was sure where she was going with this, but a few students raised their hands.

"Uh, well, I have. Like, I am right now..."

"Yeah, technically, my mom and I are playing this together, so I qualify."

"As do I. So I'll raise my hand...What about you, Porta?"

"M-me? Uh, um... I guess...technically..."

The students with their hands up were Masato, Wise, Medhi, and (not very high) Porta. None of the other students raised their hands.

Ms. Mamako nodded, as if she'd expected this.

"Yes, thank you. You can put your hands down now. I thought there might not be many... Very well. Let's learn!"

Ms. Mamako turned around and wrote *Gaming with Mommy* on the board.

"Maybe some of you are thinking you could never game with your mother. But don't worry! If you listen to your teacher carefully, I'll make it so all of you can. First, Ma-kun."

"What? I mean... Yes, Ms. Mamako?"

"Do you remember how the two of us started playing this game?"

"Well... Uh, I think it started when you applied for something without asking me..."

"Yes. In our case, that's all it took! And we ended up inside this game together. But it's also possible for children to file that application."

"Oh? It is?"

He hadn't known that. Masato was actually learning things!

...Wait.

"...Mm? Something's not adding up..."

"But be careful when you're applying. I'm sure your mother wants to play with you, but she had to look after the house, and if she's busy, it's best to

consult her first...”

“Uh, hold on, Ms. Mamako. I seem to recall you not consulting your son beforehand. Like, at all.”

“Oh! R-right! I’m very sorry about that! I was so excited about getting closer to you it never even occurred to me! I can’t apologize enough.”

“Uh, sure. Apology accepted. But moving on... That’s not my point.”

“Oh? What is?”

“What you’re explaining is how to start playing the game we’re all inside, *MMMMMMORPG* (working title).”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“But uh... Is that really useful information for characters that are already *in* the game?”

He glanced at the other students. His party was composed of test players, and they were following along just fine, but the rest of the class looked confused. Like they had no idea what Ms. Mamako was talking about.

After all, every one of these students was an NPC built for the game.

Explaining how to get from the real world to the game world was not at all useful or even comprehensible.

“Oh my! I’m sorry; that was careless of me.”

“Uh, well, no big deal. I learned something anyway.”

“Then we’d better change course... Um... Oh, I know! I have the perfect thing!”

With a flourish and a big smile, Ms. Mamako produced a booklet. The title: *MOM ADVENTURE DRILLS*

On the cover was a cartoonish drawing of Ms. Mamako’s face.

“...Uh, Ms. Mamako? What is that?”

“Classroom materials! Ms. Shiraaase prepared these for me in her capacity as the school’s acting headmaster.”

“Shiraaase made it... That alone fills me with dread...”

“Let’s solve these problems together!”

Ms. Mamako handed out a copy of the booklet to every student. “First... Let’s go with this one.”

She wrote a problem on the board.

[] attacks. The monster horde is defeated.

And now, the question.

“What word goes in the blank space? Raise your hand if you know!”



Masato really didn't want to, but since he was technically in school, he gave it some thought.

This is clearly combat...so the key here is the monster "horde."

The blank must be the name of a job. One good at AOE and multi-target attacks.

But then...

"Ms. Mamako, allow me to answer," said Medhi, the beautiful straight A student.

"Yes, Medhi. What's your answer?"

"I believe the blank is best filled with *Mom*."

[Mom attacks. The monster horde is defeated.]

That was certainly the default state for Masato's party. Clearly.

"Yes! That's right. Well done, Medhi. A wonderful answer. You're so clever!"

"No, not at all. This is simply the result of my mother's upbringing. She may have gone a little overboard at times, but... Rrgh..."

Bad memories came flooding back, and Medhi started quietly kicking the leg of her desk. But she was correct.

The other students were very impressed.

"Ohhh... The answer is *Mom*!"

"Mom beats all the monsters."

"Moms are amazing! I had no idea."

"Yo, classmates! That only applies to *my* mom. It's not typical or anything! Just wanted to be clear."

False information would hardly help anyone, so he tried to clarify... But were any classmates listening?

Moving right along.

"Next problem... Yes, I think this one will do!"

Ms. Mamako checked her booklet and wrote on the board.

The hero held [] aloft. A blinding light shone forth. The veil of darkness shrouding the demon lord was torn away.

The next problem.

“Anyone know? If you—”

“I know! I know! Pick me! This one’s sooo easy!”

Wise was going full-tilt boogie with the hand raising.

“The answer is *Mom*, right? Right?!”

[The hero held Mom aloft. A blinding light shone forth. The veil of darkness shrouding the demon lord was torn away.]

Yeah...

“Uh, Wise, that doesn’t even make—”

“Yes! You’re correct, Wise.”

“Hell yeah! The Ultimate Sage rules again!”

Wise was, apparently, correct.

But how?!

“Huh? She’s right? No, no, wait, Mo—Ms. Mamako! That can’t be right! Please tell me it isn’t!”

“No, she’s correct! I mean, moms do glow! See?” *Glowwww!*

Ms. Mamako activated A Mother’s Light! A blinding light shone from Ms. Mamako’s body!

Bathed in this warm, soft light, the students were very impressed.

“Wow! Moms really do glow!”

“Amazing! I never knew moms could glow!”

“Hey, hey, wait, wait! That’s not true! They don’t usually glow! My mom’s just weird like that!”

“Oh, and Masato, you’re a Hero! So you held Mamako aloft to fight a demon

lord? You're amazing...!"

"Of course I didn't! Don't be ridiculous! Use your head! That would never happen!"

Masato's desperate denials were no match for the evidence of a glowing Mamako.

Moving right along:

"Next! Oh, this one's a little tricky."

Ms. Mamako wrote the problem on the board.

Kindly villager: Don't forget your []! Pick the equip option!

What now?

"This is a line of dialogue a villager says. A piece of advice for adventurers, I suppose? If anyone—"

"Yep."

Masato raised his hand. He knew where this was going.

"Yes, Ma-kun? What's the answer?"

"The answer is *new gear*. Obviously."

The kindly villager was reminding adventurers, "Don't forget your new gear! Pick the equip option!"

Standard RPG stuff. Advice new players needed. There was nearly always an NPC in the first village who reminded people of this.

Anyone who'd ever played an RPG would know that...

"Oh no. Ma-kun, that's incorrect!"

Ms. Mamako looked very disappointed.

Wait, what?

"Huh? Mo—Ms. Mamako, how is that wrong? It's clearly the right answer!"

"I'm sorry, Ma-kun. I'd love to say you're right, but the drill book has a different answer."

“A different... Oh, Shiraaase wrote that drill book, right? That makes it all suspect.”

“I’m really sorry. Does anyone else know?”

“Yes! I might know!” Porta bounced up in her seat, hand up.

Masato wasn’t about to ruin her chance to answer. He put his frustration aside and listened.

“Yes, Porta? What’s your answer?”

“Um, um... The answer is *mom*!”

[The kindly villager said, “Don’t forget your mom! Pick the equip option.”]

Wait, that doesn’t even...

“Amazing! Porta, you’re right!”

“Oh! I did it! I’m so glad!”

“Wow! Porta, good j— No, waaaaaaait! Porta? Portaaa?! This isn’t like you! You don’t usually play along with this kind of dumb joke!”

“Wow! You can equip your mom?”

“I never knew! I wonder what it’s like!”

“Moms can defeat monster hordes, glow, and be equipped! Moms are amazing!”

“Classmaaaaaates! You’re learning lies! None of this is true! Please, come to your senses!”

“Okay, next problem!”

“You can’t just breeze past thiiiis!”

Masato was on the verge of an aneurysm, but it was time to move on.

[] Adventure Drills are on sale at a bookstore near you!

What could go in *that* blank?

“We get the joke alreadyyyyyyy! The answer’s always gonna be *mom*, and this drill book will never be on sale anywhere!”

“I think it is, actually! Ms. Shiraaase said there were already over a million copies in print!”

“A m-m-million?! A million copies of *these* drills?! Has the entire country gone *mad*?!”

[Mom Adventure Drills are on sale at a bookstore near you!]

At every bookstore inside the game world, at least.

Second period—gym class.

The students had all changed into gym uniforms and gathered on the field, Masato’s party among them. Each had large tags with their names on their chests.

“When did they make these?”

“Apparently, Mamako made them all this morning. Handmade gym uniforms!” Medhi gestured to the name tag on her chest. It was being propped up significantly by her prodigious... Nope, focus on the name tag. Just the name tag.

“She must have had her hands full making breakfast, but she still did all this? That’s amazing!”

Porta was wearing a very cute name tag. She was jumping up and down excitedly, and the bottom of her shirt kept lifting up, revealing her belly button. But he was looking at her name tag.

“Well, Mamako is the super-mom. Ha-ha!” Wise laughed as if this were her accomplishment, puffing up her name tag.

Or rather, puffing up her chest? No, no, she didn’t have one of those.

But Masato quietly filed the other images away in his mental diary.

“...So? Why isn’t the super-one here?”

Masato looked around, but there was no sign of her. The bell had already rang. Class should have started...

Then:

“Sorry, everyone! I didn’t mean to keep you waiting.”

Ms. Mamako came running toward them.

Her ponytail trailed in the wind, her generous bosom bouncing all around inside her tracksuit.

Gym teacher version Ms. Mamako appeared!

Already sweaty.

“*Hah, hah... S-sorry, everyone! I accidentally went to the gym instead... Hah, hah... Ma-kun, everyone, I’m so sorry!*”

“Uh, yeah, sure, no big deal. You’re *really* sweaty there, Mom.”

“I was in such a hurry... Whew. Maybe I’d better take this jacket off!”

“Go ahead. Suit yourself.”

“Okay...”

Ms. Mamako lowered the zipper on her tracksuit jacket and started to peel it off.

The gym shirt under it was soaked in sweat and translucent.

You could clearly see the elegantly embroidered, brightly colored bra beneath. “Put that back on! Now!” “Huh? O-okay!” Her son was not about to let that slide.

Now, then. Students and teacher, all present.

“Well, let’s get class started. Let’s all exercise together!”

“““““Yes, Ms. Mamako!”””””

“...*Sigh...* I hope this doesn’t get *too* weird...”

Masato was anxious, but everyone else seemed excited.

Today was track and field.

“First, sprinting! Everyone, try your best!”

Following Ms. Mamako’s instructions, the students gathered at the start of

the hundred-meter lane. Running four at a time, by order of seat number.

Ms. Mamako was the starter.

“On your mark! Get set... Mom it!”

“““““Yeahhhhhh!”””””

The runners were off! Full-speed dash!

And a moment later, they’d run the full hundred meters and crossed the finish line!

“Oh my! You’re all so good! So fast! Right, Ma-kun?”

“Uh, sure... They’re pretty fast... But about that start signal...”

“Next set of four! On your mark! Get set... Mom it!”

“““““Rarghhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”””””

The next set of students went into their dash, ignoring Masato’s quiet protest. In a moment, they were past the finish line! “Why are they so serious about this...?” He had no clue, but...they sure were fast!

And next up was his party.

First lane: Masato.

“*Sigh*... I so don’t wanna...”

Second lane: Wise.

“Ha! I may be a Mage, but that doesn’t mean I’m not athletic!”

Third lane: Medhi.

“I would say I’m rather good at this. At the very least, I’m sure I can beat Wise.”

Fourth lane: Porta.

“I’ll try my best!”

All four at the starting line, crouching, ready for the moment.

Time for battle. The signal from Ms. Mamako!

“Get set... Mom it!”

And they were off! “Ha!” Medhi’s form was perfect. “Argh!” “Whoa!” Wise and Porta were still in it, running as fast as they could!

Meanwhile...

“*Sigh*... To hell with this...”

Masato was slowly jogging behind them.

“Oh, I forgot to mention! Whoever comes in last gets special private training with your teacher after school!”

“To hell with THAAAAT!”

Masato went into a headlong dash! Fleeing that nightmare, escaping his certain doom!

Masato ran! “Whoaaa!” He passed Porta. “Hey!” Passed Wise. “No!” Drew even with Medhi and then pushed ahead.

Masato placed first!

“Hell yeah!”



Nothing made him go faster than the threat of extra lessons. He dominated.

Medhi was second, Wise was third.

“Second... My mother would be furious...” Medhi hung her head.

“Hey, Medhi! No getting depressed here! Your mother’s learned to forgive this stuff, remember?!”

Medhi’s dark power was starting to leak out.

More importantly...

“Aw... I came in last...”

Shame. Porta was fourth. The moment she reached the goal, she looked so sad.

This would never do. The other party members flocked around her.

“Er, uh... Cheer up, Porta! There’s always next time!”

“Th-that’s right! You’re still only twelve!”

“And we’re all in high school! So you can’t let this get to you, okay?”

“That’s right,” Ms. Mamako said, racing over. “It doesn’t matter what place you’re in. All that matters is that you try your best.”

“Yes!” Porta chirped, breaking into a smile. “I ran as fast as I could! So I’m just fine!”

A full recovery. Whew.

But at this point, Ms. Mamako turned and said, “Now it’s my turn to try!”

“Uh, what? Ms. Mamako, you’re gonna run? ...Can you even do that?”

“Of course I can! I know how to run! I might even beat you, Ma-kun!”

“Huh...”

Was that really possible?

It certainly roused his competitive spirit.

“Ha-ha-ha!” he said. “Interesting. You think you can beat me? Ohhh? Then let’s find out! Ms. Mamako against me! One-on-one!”

“Goodness! A race between mother and son? How lovely! Let’s do it!”

Masato was crackling with excitement, and Mamako was all smiles—like fireworks racing flowers!

Hasty preparations. Masato vs Ms. Mamako! Hundred-meter dash!

“Commentary provided by yours truly, Wise, and...”

“And me, Medhi... Not that there seems to be much to comment on.”

“Yeah, good point. Guess we’ll just cheer them on normally, then.”

Wise and Medhi sat down nearby, watching. So did the rest of the students.

Masato and Ms. Mamako stood at the starting line.

“Ms. Mamako, this is a serious contest. I’ll be giving it everything I’ve got, so don’t you show me any mercy.”

“Oh, of course! I’ll do the same...and I have a secret plan.”

“Oh, do you? Ha-ha. I have no idea what that could be, but go ahead! Try it. I’ll still win in the end.”

Promising to make this a fair fight, they crouched down.

Wise doubled as the starter, but just before she gave the signal...

...Mamako started whispering.

“Just imagine it... It’s early in the morning... Ma-kun left the house without eating breakfast...and he forgot his lunch. That’s right. I have to get it to him! I have to catch him and give Ma-kun his lunch!”

“Uh, wait...”

A terrifying aura was seeping out of Ms. Mamako.

On your mark.

“Here we go... Get set... Mom it!”

And they’re off!

The second the signal arrived, Ms. Mamako was off like a rocket!

“Ma-kun! Don’t forget your luuuuunch!”

“Wahhh! She’s talking crazy but also crazy fast?!”

Masato hastily broke into a sprint, but Ms. Mamako was already in the lead, running like the wind.

By the time Masato crossed the thirty-meter mark, Ms. Mamako was already at the goal!

“Here’s your lunch! Hee-hee! I did it!”

“Hoooooowwww?! There’s no way you’re that fast!”

Her time was 3.88—nothing official and only a mom record.

Masato rolled in for a belated finish, utterly demoralized. He collapsed to his knees in front of Ms. Mamako.

“Wh-what was that...? How was that even possible?”

“That was your teacher’s secret plan! I called it Operation: A Mother’s Feelings.”

“A Mother’s Feelings?”

“That’s right! Your teacher was running with A Mother’s Feelings of bringing her son a lunch. That’s why I was so fast.”

“Th-that’s ridiculous! There’s no way you can run that fast! I won’t accept this... As the last bastion of common sense around here, I refuse!”

He stomped the ground angrily.

The other students ignored him, surrounding Ms. Mamako.

“Ms. Mamako! You were amazing!”

“How do you run so fast? Can you give us some tips?”

“Hee-hee. Well, I used a secret technique.”

“A secret technique... And if we use that secret technique, can we run fast, too?”

“Of course!”

“No, they caaaan’t! Nobody caaaan! Arghhh... You leave me no choice! I’ll have to prove what truth is! All of you, go ahead! Use this secret technique if

you like! I'll take you on!"

That did it. Now it was Masato vs every misguided student NPC.

There was no way he was going to accept that anything as dumb as A Mother's Feelings could raise athletic ability. Masato swore he would win. He took his place on the starting line.

The moment of truth. They were off!

First round:

"Go, everyone! A Mother's Feelings! On your mark... Get set... Mom it!"

"Ridiculous! This can't possibly make them—!"

"Today is burnable trash day! But the sanitation truck is already here! I have to get the garbage bag to the curb!" *Whoosh!*

The winner: seat number one.

Second round:

"Get set... Mom it!"

"Argh! Th-this can't be happening! It can't—!"

"Only five minutes before the flash sale at the supermarket ends! I have to hurry!" *Whoooosh!*

The victor: seat number two.

Third round:

"Mom it!"

"W-wait! Waaaait! This is all wrong!"

"Oh, my child's cram school is letting out! There's been a lot of crime lately! I'd better be there to meet them!" *Whooooooooooooooooooooosh!*

In the lead: seat number three.

And so on and so forth...

The final results:

“Ms. Mamako, you’re amazing! We were all so much faster! Every student easily beat Masato!”

“Ms. Mamako was right! I’m so impressed.”

“I’ve never been athletic, but running this fast is amazing! I’m so glad you were our teacher today!”

“Professor Mama! I want to run some more! I want to have more fun doing sports!”

“Hee-hee. I’m so glad to hear it. Let’s keep this up and enjoy PE together!”

“““““Yeah!”””””

The crowd around Ms. Mamako cheered.

Meanwhile...

“*Hahhh... Hahhh... Unacceptable... It’s just too dumb... I won’t stand for it...*”

Utterly exhausted, Masato breathed his last, all alone.

(No, he’s not *actually* dead.)

“*...Hahhh... Arghhh... I’m so done... No more... Do whatever you want... Just leave me out of it.*”

“Sheesh, Masato. Quit sulking!”

“That’s right, Masato. You can’t just abandon your purpose in life.”

“What do you mean by that? I’m not just here to scream comedic protests, you know!”

“Masato! Hang in there! Keep screaming!”

“Ugh... Porta’s encouragement definitely makes me want to keep trying, but... but...”

No matter how hard he tried, Masato’s efforts would prove futile.

After all, the next period was...

“Okay, everyone! The moment you’ve been waiting for! Third and fourth

periods are two whole hours of home economics! Hee-hee!”

That apron looked all too fitting on Ms. Mamako. Like she said, it was time to cook.

The home ec class had all manner of cooking utensils and experiment apparatuses.

Mamako and cooking—they went hand in hand.

Ms. Mamako was preparing to teach the subject she was best at, so naturally, people were excited. Amazing dishes would come out one after another to cheers, applause, and admiration.

The outcome was obvious.

“*Sigh...* There’s no point even trying to convince anyone...”

“Ms. Mamako is amazing!” was now a foregone conclusion.

So Masato collapsed on a desk, determined to just let it all happen.

“Let’s begin...is what I’d love to say,” Ms. Mamako began, looking very sorry. “But there’s just one problem. We don’t actually have any ingredients! So we can’t cook anything.”

“...Huh?”

Masato had not been expecting this, and that was enough to make him sit up.

No ingredients? Ms. Mamako was clearly right. There were tons of utensils but no actual food.

How could class happen now?

“Oh... Does that mean class is dismissed? It does, right? Please say it does.”

If Mamako’s class failed, the weird delusions everyone had about her would be shattered. The world would make sense once more.

Masato was already pumping his fist, but...

“So I think the first thing we should do today is go gather some ingredients!”

...Ms. Mamako had already defeated him. She seemed quite fired up about the whole thing.

“Gather them how? ...Um, Ms. Mamako! A word?”

“Yes, Ma-kun? What is it?”

“You mean you want us going shopping, right? But is that a good idea? We can’t leave the school grounds during class, right? *Right?*”

Masato was being quite insistent. Even he knew how aggravating this sounded.

But that was fine. No ingredients meant no cooking and an end to his mother’s reign of perfection. If he could just block them from leaving the grounds...

But Ms. Mamako just smiled.

“That is true! As strange as he’s acting, Ma-kun has a point.”

“Strange? Okay, fair, I’d noticed that myself, but still!”

“But at a time like this, all we have to do is borrow a little mom power, and the problem goes away!”

“Huh? No, that wouldn’t—”

“Hee-hee. But it will! Let me show you. Everyone, please gather at the windows.”

The students did as they were told. Even Masato reluctantly joined, standing at the very edge of the crowd.

Ms. Mamako opened the window and asked the enthusiastic students, “Now then, question for everyone. Where do the ingredients we normally eat come from?”

“Where? From grocery stores.”

“That’s right. But where do the grocery stores get them?”

“I believe they get them from farmers and ranchers. Fishermen, too.”

“And where do the people in those occupations get their products?”

“Oh! Fields! Ranches! And the ocean!”

“That’s correct. So here’s the problem. Can we personify the land where fields

and ranches lie? And the sea?”

The students all looked at one another. A realization dawned on them.

One of them (a certain son) let out the biggest possible sigh and tried to leave the room. But never mind him.

The others all cried out together.

“““““The earth and the sea are both mothers!”””””

“That’s right! Full marks! Now let me show you a mother’s power!”

Mamako held a sword in both hands.

In her right hand, the crimson Holy Sword of Mother Earth, Terra di Madre.

In her left hand, the deep-blue Holy Sword of Mother Ocean, Altura.

She pointed both swords out the window.

“Mother Earth, Mother Ocean... If you are mothers, you know how I feel. These children want to learn about cooking. And once they have, imagine them standing in the kitchen with their own mothers. Wouldn’t that be nice? If you know how that feels, lend me your power!”

Both mothers immediately answered her call.

A massive pillar of earth appeared in town, and a massive waterspout shot up from the sea.

The two columns toppled toward the school.

At the tips of each were a grocery store and a ship, respectively. They stopped just outside the classroom windows.

“Yikes?! Wh-wh-what’s going on?”

“H-how is this even possible?”

The grocery store owner and the fisherman were beside themselves.

But Mamako just smiled.

“Sorry for the sudden intrusion! We’re about to hold a home economics class, and we’re fresh out of ingredients.”

“Huh? Ingredients for class? Gee, what perfect timing! I don’t mean to foist my leftovers on you, but I’ve got plenty of ingredients I’m not likely to sell! Go ahead and use them!”

“I’ve got plenty to offer myself! I got a big haul today, too many fish to ever package for sale! If I don’t do something, they’ll start to rot, and that’s hardly fair to the sea! Go on, take them!”

The friendly owner and fisherman began handing supplies through the window—meat, veggies, fruit, fish, shellfish, and seaweed.

Also, an earthen tentacle had bound and gagged Masato—“Hngggg?! Mmmph!”—and deposited him next to the mountains of ingredients.

Supplies obtained!

“Oh my! So many! Such a help. I’d be happy to settle the tab later.”

“No charge! It’s all for educational purposes, right? Learn how to cook, kids. And if you want to know more about these ingredients, just tell people to come by my shop!”

“Same goes for me! Fishing’s the best job around! We’re always hiring! Come on by!”

Both seemed more interested in hiring than collecting payment. Sign of the times, perhaps.

The two pillars slowly retreated, taking the shop and boat back to where they belonged.

And...

“Th-this is the power of a mother! Amazing! Ms. Mamako’s amazing!”

“I had no idea mothers had such power. No idea!”

“Mother Earth and Mother Ocean... We’ve been living in harmony with such maternal power all this time... And our teacher is a mother like Ms. Mamako! My heart belongs to mothers everywhere!”

This overwhelming spectacle had left the students unable to think about anything but mothers! Mothers were the best! Hooray for Ms. Mamako!

And of course...

“All right, everyone! Let’s start the class! We’ll be making lunches. The menu is up to you! Choose any ingredients you like.”

““““Okay!”””””

Time to cook. Ms. Mamako’s reign began, as predictable as it was unavoidable.

“Now, should I cook something, too?”

“I’m dying to watch you cook, Ms. Mamako!” said Wise.

“Yes, I believe we could learn a lot from observing her,” added Medhi.

“What ingredients will Professor Mama pick?!”

“Your teacher will pick... Well, of course! Hee-hee...”

“Hngg?! Hngggggg?! Mmmph!”

Feeling a syrupy gaze on him, the largest ingredient in the room began thrashing around.

The ingredient Ms. Mamako picked was a lively, fresh son.

Lunch break.

Having nearly been cooked himself, Masato was staring at the son she did cook.

“How am I supposed to eat a lunch made to look like my own face?”

His own face (far too real) staring back up at him, Masato let out the longest sigh yet.

Fifth period.

Normally, another subject was supposed to happen, but instead, it was even more home economics.

Which meant...

“Ms. Mamako! Teach us about moms!”

“We want to learn more about moms!”

“I feel like learning about moms will lead to answers...answers to the things we’ve been questioning all along!”

“Very well. Then I’ll teach you everything I know!”

Faced with this fervent desire, home economics class continued.

This time they were focused on another core mom skill: cleaning.

In the center of the classroom stood Ms. Mamako, broom in hand.

“First, let me show you the basics of Mom Cleaning. Watch carefully as I clean.”

Ms. Mamako began sweeping the floor, keeping a steady rhythm.

She appeared to just be cleaning normally.

The students gathered around watched intently, so as not to miss a thing. Taking this very seriously.

Masato watched from a distance, shaking his head.

“Come on! What could you possibly get out of this? I don’t get it.”

She’d shown them one too many of Mom’s AMAAAAAAAAAAAZING moments, and they’d all lost their marbles. That explained it.

But if so, this situation was dire indeed.

I’d better do something before... Yeah, I will do something! I’m the hero!

It was his job to right the world’s wrongs. Feeling a strong sense of duty, Masato stepped up, ready to take action...

But then Wise came over.

“Oh, please. Masato, if you don’t get the point of Ms. Mamako’s cleaning, you’ve got a lot to learn. You’re an unfit mother.”

“I’m not even a mother in the first place! And sure, I’ve got plenty to learn,

but...what meaning could cleaning possibly have? This is pointless.”

“No, it’s not. Just watch me, and you’ll understand. See?”

“I’m watching, and I don’t— Wha—?!”

In that moment, Masato witnessed something mind-blowing.

Wise had a broom in her hands and was sweeping the floor. The problem was *how* she was doing it.

Wise was sweeping diagonally downward to the left and then to the right—and then she’d repeat the motion. Almost as if she was drawing an M with the broom.

He looked at Ms. Mamako and saw she was sweeping the same way.

And...

“...Ah! Medhi, too!”

Medhi was spraying cleaning fluid on the windows—but the suds on the windowpanes were forming an M.

Also...

“Ahhh! Even Porta?!”

...Porta was wiping that fluid, and her hands were moving in an M shape!

And that’s not all! Students cleaning the blackboard under Ms. Mamako’s supervision, students wiping down the walls, students cleaning the desks—they all were tracing M shapes!

Finally...

“...What the—?! N-no... No! I’m doing it, too?!”

Masato found himself holding a broom, sweeping M shapes on the floor. Since when?!

As he gaped in horror, the girls whispered to him.

“Masato. Calm your heart and watch what’s happening.”

“M is for *Mom*—mothers are cleaning everything, making it beautiful.”

“Cleaning the room means cleaning your own heart!”

“Cleaning...my heart...”

Yes. Cleaning a room the mom way also cleaned out the heart of the one doing the cleaning.

Moms swept out the unnecessary hang-ups that had accumulated within.

That was what Mom Cleaning really meant: the overwhelming effect of cleaning like a mom.

The negative emotions festering within me... They're all fading...

Every inch of his heart purified in the name of mothers everywhere.

Being cleaned by moms was so comforting. Refreshing.

Like the proverbial scales falling from his eyes. And not just an expression.

“I... What have I been doing? Why have I been against something so amazing?”

“Sheesh. Took you long enough to figure it out.”

“Yes. Even Masato understands now.”

“Great, Masato! Help us Mom Clean!”

“Yeah! I think I will! I’d love to Mom Clean!”

And with every heart polished mom-style, all accepted the truth about how wonderful moms were.

Mamako’s day as a teacher was over.

“I hate to leave, but we must head to our next adventure. Let’s go home.”

“Yeah. Let’s go.”

Turning her back on the school, Mamako slowly walked away. The rest of the party shook off their lingering attachments and followed after.

Then...

“Ms. Mamako! Wait!”

Students came pouring out of the gates—Ms. Mamako’s students.

“Ms. Mamako! I wish you could be our teacher forever!”

“But we know you have to go. We understand! So we won’t stop you. We just want you to know how we feel!”

“We’re going to be fine! You taught us so many important things! You showed us the path forward!”

Their ASCII-art faces shedding tears, the students threw themselves bodily into their emotional outburst. Boys and girls alike, all said the same thing, as one: “““““Someday, I’ll be a wonderful mother just like Ms. Mamako!”””””

Now that they knew how wonderful a mother could be, they all aspired to be one. Their paths in life were determined!

And they had words for their rival, too.

“Masato! Someday I’ll be a wonderful mother. When that happens, fight me again! We’ll see which of us is the better mother!”

“Damn straight! I’m the Mother Hero, and I won’t run from any fight! Come at me!”

“Wise! Medhi! We’ll fight you, too!”

“Ha! Works for me! My chain-mom skills will prove who’s the better mother!”

“I’ll never lose a battle of mom spells. I’ll kick you out of my way! Heh-heh-heh.”

“Porta! We’ll battle with our mom creation skills!”

“Yes! I’ll never lose a battle of mom creation!”

They vowed to meet again and test their skills once more.

But for today, they had to part.

With a beautiful smile, Mamako bid the students farewell.

“Be well, everyone! The next time we meet, we’ll all be moms!”

And she did not turn back again. There was no need.

The students' tears would lead them to their futures.

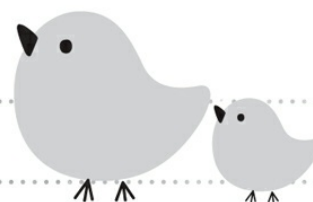
As the party walked away...

“What the hell is going ooooooooooon?! Stop this madnesssss!!”

...Masato regained his sanity, and his scream of horror echoed across the night sky.

Mom Consultation Forum 2

Mama's BBS



Question

Submitted by: MISO SOUP & TOFU



Question from both of us! Please tell us the secret to becoming a wonderful mother like Mamako! Looking forward to your response!

Answer

MAMAKO



The next question is from Miso Soup and Tofu...
Oh, those are Wise's and Medhi's favorite foods!

WISE



That's right! This question is from Medhi and me!
Kinda cool you remember our favorite foods.

MEDHI



Always paying such close attention to children and never forgetting the important things... Another few valuable maternal skills.

MAMAKO

No need to overthink these things. If children are happy, mothers are happy, so you naturally remember! Let's all mom together!



Chapter 3 This Is the Last Time I'm Letting Mom Fill Out Any Surveys, Ever.

Name:

Mamako Oosuki.

Job:

Normal Hero's Mother.

Address:

Varies. (I'm adventuring with my son and his party, so we normally stay at inns.) E-mail:

Ma-kuns-mommy@mmmmmmorpg

Desired Prize Number:

#2, the Loving Family Canteen, please.

If you have opinions or requests, please add them below.

We were out shopping in a local town and were informed about this special event. That's where we got the flyer!

Since we're adventurers, we regularly check quest request boards, but I think it's quite easy for us to overlook this sort of thing. It would be a real shame to miss an important event like this!

Personally, I think it would be a good idea to set up a system to inform us of these opportunities via e-mail. I do hope you look into it!

The special event this time is happening really far away from where we are, but we have party members who know transportation magic, so I think we'll be able to make it.

This opportunity only happens once a year! I'm very excited. I'll do my best!

Thank you very much.

Evening. A room at an inn.

Masato had washed the grime and exhaustion away in the bath, and he swung by the dining room, looking for something to drink.

“...Hmm, the light’s on. Someone here?”

He peeked inside and found Mamako sitting at the table, reading something intently.

“Still working on that survey from management? ...No, guess not.”

“Oh, Ma-kun. Done with your bath already? I was going to join you!”

“Then getting out early saved my life. So? What is it this time?”

“A different survey. If I fill this out and bring it to them, I can win a prize!”

Mamako showed him the survey form. This one was actually printed out on paper.

Masato read the answers and scowled for the third time that day.

“The prize you want is a Loving Family Canteen? We clearly don’t need *that*. But more importantly, I gotta ask...”

“Yes? What is it?”

“You mention a special event, but...what is it?”

“It’s a really, really wonderful event!” Mamako glowed—brightly.

“Y-yeah, I can tell you’re excited... Another event for moms, then?”

“Not this time, no, not like that tournament. This time, all of you can join in, too! But of course, in a pinch you can leave it all to Mommy; don’t worry! I’ll do my best!”

“The more fired up you get, the more anxious I am...”

“Oh, and I have a favor to ask you!”

Mamako went on the offensive! “Ma-kun!” “Too close!” Masato quickly threw up a hand to guard, but she ducked right under it, getting even closer!

“I was hoping we could all participate tomorrow. What do you say?” *Shove,*

shove.

“Tomorrow? Well... We didn’t have any plans, and the girls were grumbling about that...”

“Then you’re in? Ma-kun, you’re in?” *Shove, shove, shove, shove.*

“Argh, okay! Fine, we’re in! Tomorrow, we’ll come with you to this special event! Okay?”

“Thank you, Ma-kun! I’m so glad you said so!”

“Augh! Don’t!”

Masato’s assent immediately resulted in an attempted embrace. “Ma-kuuuun!” “Stop!” Masato got his hands on her shoulders, pushing her back!

“Whew! A narrow escape! I’m not the kind of son who lets his guard down and gets unwarranted mom hugs! Mwa-ha-ha-ha!”

“Oh my. No need to restrain yourself, Ma-kun!”

“I’m not! How many times do I have to ask you to keep that stuff to a minimum?!”

For today, he’d managed to resist the force of his mother’s embrace, and she reluctantly retreated.

But even as he sighed with relief...

“Then I’ll just finish filling out this survey! *PS: I’m even more excited now that my son, Ma-kun, has agreed to join his mommy in this event!* That should do it. Let’s try hard together! Hee-hee!”

“Yo, don’t write that! They’ll think I’m some spoiled little brat!”

Mamako was thoroughly satisfied with the dream scenario she’d written down.

And with that, the heroic mother-son duo and their party were set to enter the special event!

Chapter 4 Just a Little Shopping, They Say, but It Never Actually Ends There with Moms.

Sudden mortal combat. A battle too intense for words.

As the battle began, Wise took the lead, charging in, ready to lay her life on the line.

“Leave this to me! I’ll show you the power of the ultimate Sage!”

Her starting dash gave her a good burst of speed, but...

“H-huh? ...Heyyyyy! No, no, no! Augh!”

Wise was grabbed by her pigtails, spun around, and easily hurled away. Significant damage!

Their opponents outnumbered them, their bloodlust overwhelming, the power they produced beyond the pale!

One party member was already at death’s door. This called for a healer!

“Wise’s impotence and uselessness is nothing new. Such a shame...but leave the rest to me!”

Medhi managed her best angelic smile, cheerily left Wise crumbled in a heap, and charged in.

She forced her way into the horde, attempting to achieve results...

“Er...what? Um, um... Eeeeeek?!”

...but there was no way through. She was grabbed by the nape of her neck and tossed away.

“Hello, old friend.” “Th-this is brutal...” Medhi rolled all the way over to Wise, where she lay on the floor, tears streaming down her face.

They were no match for these foes. It was time to call it quits.

“This is impossible! I vote we give up,” Masato declared.

“Masato, wait! I want to try, too! Here I go! Hyaaaah!”

“Ah! Portaaa?!”

Even Porta went for it!

Using her size to her advantage, she slipped through the horde, slowly pressing forward...

“Er, um? Wh-wh-whoaahhhhh-aaaahhh!”

Jostled by the crowd, Porta was spun around and around until she grew dizzy. “Porta! Grab my hand!” “Okaaay-ay-ay-ay-ay!” Masato barely managed to free her in time.

This was too fierce a challenge. They had no chance of victory.

“Like I said, impossible! We have no choice but to retreat!”

Masato tried to order his forces back...

...but even as he did...

“Ma-kun, don’t worry! Leave it to Mommy! ...Here I go! Wheeee!”

Mamako had been waiting patiently at the rear, but now she let out an enthusiastic cry.

In her right hand, a crimson shopping basket.

In her left hand, a deep-blue shopping basket.

Dual-wielding shopping baskets, Mamako charged forward with a smile.

“Excuse me! Coming through! If you’ll just pardon me!”

She passed through the horde too fast for the eye to follow.

And reached out to grab...the sale item.

“Oh, isn’t this nice? I wouldn’t mind having one of these, too. And—oh! It’s so inexpensive! I’d definitely better buy this!”

Instantly evaluating her targets and non-targets alike, product after product shot into her baskets—shopping at blazing-fast speeds.

“*Sigh...* I knew this was gonna be all about Mom. It always is.”

Masato shook his head, looking at the flyer in his hand.

ANNUAL SPECIAL EVENT! THE SUPER-SUPER-SUPER-SALE!

This was the battle the party had joined.

“Invincible even in the throngs of a bargain sale. That’s Mamako for you.”

“She’s shopping at two times the volume, multi-targeting all areas of the sale. No one stands a chance of stopping her.”

“Mama’s amazing! She’s a super-mom!”

Having experienced the opposition firsthand, the girls could only watch Mamako, awestruck.

Masato didn’t care anymore.

“...I’ll just go collect that prize.”

He turned his back on the frothing horde of bargain hunters, on Mamako’s dominance of the field, and went to get the Loving Family Canteen.

With the fearsome battle known as shopping complete, the party piled the spoils of victory into Porta’s bag and left the store behind.

Before them lay buildings with white mud walls, brick walls, and roofs painted in warm colors. Like a town in a classic fantasy...a very familiar sight. The wind brushing gently through the streets seemed familiar as well.

The party was in the capital of Catharn, the starting point of their adventure.

“I was wondering why you suddenly wanted to go back to Catharn...”

“This sale only happens once a year! And you get a free pack of eggs for every two thousand mum you spend!”

“Yeah, I get it. No mom could pass that up, I’m sure. There was a really mouthwatering quest, but sales take priority... Adventuring with your mom can be a real trial sometimes.”

“A mouthwatering quest? There are quests you can eat?”

“That’s not what... I just mean the reward was good, okay? Never mind.”

Explaining that quests weren't food was a chore he was not up to today.

Sensing his mood, his party began poking at him.

"Yo, Masato. Stop grumbling! This isn't all bad."

"That's right. This shopping expedition allowed us to restock our food supplies."

"And now Mama can make us all mouthwatering food! I can't wait! ...Oh, Masato, it's ready! Here!"

"Uh...what's ready?"

Porta held out the prize they'd received—the Loving Family Canteen, child model.

"It's full of HP recovery potion! I also prepared the mom model for Mama! Here!"

"Thank you. I'll carry this over my shoulders! Does this look right?"

Mamako equipped the mom canteen. The shoulder strap fit right in the valley between her generous bosom.

"You too, Ma-kun."

"Out of the question. No way. Please say I don't have to."

"Come on, Masato. No need to hold back! Pfft."

"I'm sorry, Porta, but I can't equip this! Just imagine what it would mean!"

A mother and son, fighting side by side, matching canteens equipped.

A powerful blow! The canteen rocks wildly! A finishing move! Crash zoom to the canteen!

You couldn't fight with a canteen equipped. "Pfft! You're right; it's killing me!" "I know!" Watching the canteens wobble all over the place was super-distracting, and combat required focus!

The Loving Family Canteens were a collector's item and would remain in Porta's safekeeping.

"Anyway, shopping's done! Which means it's time for the usual!"

A transport spell to another town and that mouthwatering quest. Masato tried to push the party toward that option, but...

“Oh? What’s that shop?”

Mamako suddenly paused, staring at a building by the side of the road.

“No, no, wait. We’ve done more than enough shopping for one day. Mm?”

The building Mamako was staring at certainly *looked* like a shop.

But the sign hanging outside had no shop name, no indication what they sold—nothing was written on it at all.

Wise and Medhi looked it over, cocking their heads.

“Has it gone out of business? Or are they opening soon?”

“It looks newly built, so I’m guessing the latter...but there doesn’t seem to be any work going on.”

“I’ll go take a look!”

Porta darted over to the building and peered through the window. Then she suddenly yelped “Whoaaaaa!” and fell over backward.

Masato hurried over and peered inside.

“Hey, what’s wrong? Are you okay...? Oh...”

The interior screamed fast-food. There was a counter for placing orders and a number of tables around.

And a coffin lying in the middle of the main aisle.

“Ah yes... Most coffins we find turn out to be *her*...”

The rest of the party peered in the window and nodded.

The building’s door wasn’t locked. “I guess we’re welcome? I’d rather not, but...” The party stepped inside, and Medhi used a revival spell.

The coffin dissipated, and everyone’s favorite nun stood up.

“Well, well. Thank you for this latest resurrection. I can infoorm you that I

am Shiraaase...the guide to your adventures and the occasional bearer of entirely harmless requests.”

She bowed with her signature perpetual calm.

“In return for restoring me to life, I present you with this plot of land and the building on its property. Please run a wonderful shop here and assist other parents and children in their struggles. I wish you the best!”

The party acquired a real estate deed! It's the beginning of a capitalist adventure!

Having no intention of doing any such thing, Masato just glared at Shiraaase.

“So what are you plotting this time?”

“I object to that phrasing. I simply wish to request your assistance! Nothing more. You see, a minor issue has cropped up...”

“Goodness, an issue?” Mamako gasped. “Tell us more!”

“This is fundamentally an admin problem... This game is primarily concerned with the bonds between parents and children, but we’ve received a number of complaints suggesting that the systems intended to support those relationships are woefully inadequate.”

“Woefully inadequate? Gee, who would’ve thought,” Wise muttered.

Shiraaase fixed her with a meaningful look. “For example, when a parent and a child have a huge fight and split up...”

“Erk...”

“Or even if they do remain together, stress builds up to the point where problems occur...”

“W-well...”

“Or we’re forced to make special exceptions to allow children to adventure on their own for lengthy periods of time...”

“Ohhh...”

“As a result of a number of such unusual behaviors from a number of parent/child pairs, and the incidents resulting from those actions, we have been

asked to strengthen the support systems.”

The bullet fired at Wise had ricocheted off Medhi and Porta as well.

Used as practical examples, all three shifted uncomfortably, staring at their feet. They were clearly keenly aware of the problems they’d caused.

Shiraaase gave this a satisfied nod and resumed her explanation.

“The admins have decided there is an urgent need to create a consultation office for parents and children to visit. I came here to inspect a potential site for such an office...and was killed by an unexpected bug.”

“And we coincidentally happened by, were unfortunate enough to revive you, and get your dirty work foisted off on us again.”

“I would rather not be treated like a demon you accidentally unleashed, but that is the long and short of it. What do you say?”

“It’s a lot to take in...”

“Naturally, if you wish to prioritize your adventures, that is totally fine. Feel free to manage this facility during downtime between escapades or treat it like sub-events...or even like a way of making up for all the problems you’ve caused for us.”

“O-okay! We get it! We’ll do it!”

“It is our duty to ensure no one else makes the same mistakes we did.”

“R-right! I really want to help!”

Poking the girls’ guilt had certainly proved motivating. They seemed downright desperate.

Mamako was on board, too.

“Our experiences might help other families. I think that’s wonderful! Ma-kun, why don’t we try it out? What do you say?”

With a huge smile, she’d sidled up to him like this was her moment.

“*Sigh...* You just want to talk to people about adventuring with your son, right?”

“Th-that’s not true! I don’t *just* want to talk; I also want to help!”

“Sure, I know. You love chattering away, not exactly new.”

So.

“Wise, Medhi, Porta, and Mamako, thank you for your help. I suppose that settles things.”

“Er...Shiraaase? Do I not get a say?”

Things were settled the moment Mamako was on board.

“Well, Mamako, if you could just fill out these forms? Feel free to just write whatever comes to mind.”

“Whatever comes to mind? Then I suppose I will...”

She made quick work of it.

“Augh! Wait!!”

“Then the rest is up to you. Good luck!”

Shiraaase stamped her approval on the forms, and the paperwork was complete.

A brand-new shop opened in a prime location in the commercial district! Its name: MOM SHOP.

No matter how many times he looked at the letters on the sign, no matter what angle he looked at it from, this fact never changed.

Masato was on his hands and knees on the street outside, unable to summon the willpower to stand.

“I...I just can’t...”

“Oh, Ma-kun?! What’s wrong? Mommy thinks this shop is going to be wonderful!”

“How?! Where?! I don’t see a single aspect that could possibly be described as wonderful!”

There were carnations decorating it, making it look like a slightly upscale café. And then that sign. Mom Shop.

But in Masato's case, this was a shop run by his actual mom. "It's even harder to go in here than the adult section at a video store..." "Goodness, Ma-kun! You've done that?" "N-no, of course not!" It was simply a metaphor.

"Mom, let's reconsider. We can't do this!"

"Oh? Why not?"

"First of all, I can't even tell what kind of shop this is!"

"It's a mom shop, so I would think it was obvious that this is a shop that solves any problems your family might have."

"It's definitely not obvious! What does that even mean?! I'm sure the others feel the same!"

He was sure the rest of the party would be ready to vent their feelings, too.

Masato ran inside, only to find...

"Welcome to the Mom Shop!"

"No matter what your troubles are, rest assured, we'll handle them."

"With Mama, we will solve your problems!"

The girls were beaming with the utmost hospitality. They seemed to be genuinely enjoying this.

"...Uh, guys, you got a moment? Let's try to be rational here."

"What the heck, Masato? Don't be a wet blanket."

"Why wouldn't I be?! This whole idea is insane! *Epecially* the name! I mean, seriously, Mom Shop?!"

"Um, any mom having issues would immediately know to come here based on the name, duh."

"And I feel the name makes that equally clear to anyone having problems with their mothers."

"The word *mom* alone makes me feel safe!"

“Good god... You’ve all been corrupted by some mysterious power...”

Masato was the last remaining hope. Only he could do something about this stupid situation.

He began furiously searching for options. But before he found any, a luxurious carriage pulled up outside.

“Pardon the intrusion! Oh-ho-ho-ho!”

A lady in a gorgeous dress sailed into the shop. She had a refined air to her that marked her as more than just your average rich woman.

Several guards followed her in, arranging themselves protectively around her.

If their manners were anything less than perfect, they might well be executed on the spot—that was the impression the guards’ grim countenances gave off, anyway.

“Um... Might I ask who you are, ma’am?”

“My! You’re in this country and don’t know? Are you, perhaps, test players?”

“Uh, yes, we are.”

“Oh. That explains it. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Queen of Catharn. I’m the queen of this country.”

“That’s a ridiculous name! But you’re aggtually the queeeeen?!”

“Oh-ho-ho! No need to get all tongue-tied. I, too, am extremely displeased with this ridiculous name; so if you would, just call me Your Majesty. I am traveling incognito today, so no need for excessive deference.”

The queen of the realm, in their shop.

“Uh, so...if I may ask, Your Majesty, what brings you here?”

“This shop’s name piqued my curiosity, so I stopped in.”

“That stupid name reeled in a top-class VIP?!”

“Stupid? Hardly! The moment I saw the shop name, I knew this was the place I was looking for! Oh-ho-ho!”

“Seriously...?”

Masato glanced around him. Wise nodded proudly. He felt defeated.

“Are you, perhaps, not open yet?”

“No, we’re open for business,” Mamako replied. She seemed every bit the part of the veteran proprietor. “Please, have a seat.”

She led the queen to a nearby table.

The other three girls sprang into action.

“Our very first customer!” Wise yelped. She ran behind the counter and used a fire spell to boil water, making tea.

“I just went shopping and bought plenty of treats!” Porta said, pulling a mountain of desserts out of her shoulder bag. She loaded them onto a tray.

“Then I’ll take care of the rest. I’ve had the proper etiquette drilled into me.”

With the tea and treats ready, it fell to Medhi to bring them to the table.

Their coordination was far better than they’d ever demonstrated in battle.

Only Masato was left standing awkwardly behind the counter, with nothing to do but watch.

Mamako and the queen were talking.

“So what sort of shop is this?”

“Well, put simply, we help resolves any issues within the family. I don’t mean to imply anything unfortunate, but if you have any such problems, we’d be happy to assist.”

“Oh my! Well, I suppose I do have one thing. The prince—my son—he just won’t let me spoil him lately.”

“Goodness, that must be so hard for you...”

“It is! I miss cuddling with him so much... What do the common folk do at times like this? If you have any good advice, I’d love to hear it.”

The queen had brought in a royal family problem. The contents of it were not something Masato was prepared to comprehend, but this was definitely the Mom Shop’s specialty.

Either way, he had to assume that his mother's supreme competence would make short work of it.

"Ah, speaking of the common folk... On the way here, I saw a very large crowd outside a shop. Do you know what was going on there?"

"Oh, that was the annual bargain sale!"

"Bargain sale? I'm not familiar with that term. Do tell me more."

"I'd be glad to!"

"...Wait."

They were already sidetracked.

This was how conversations between moms always went...

Easily an hour later...

"Well, we certainly did chatter away! Sorry I stayed so long."

"Oh, don't worry about it! I had such fun."

"So did I... Oh, come to think of it, I was here for advice!"

"You want to spoil your son more, right? Well, the first thing to do is to find a way to make time for the two of you together. Why not go shopping? Just the two of you?"

"I see... Shopping with my son. Hmm, what would we buy...? Oh, I know! I'll try that!"

A brief conversation, indeed, but enough to reach a conclusion. It had taken approximately ten seconds. After an entire hour wasted on small talk.

"Well, best of luck to you, Your Majesty. I'll be rooting for you."

"Thank you! You've done me such a service... I've been so envious of parents who are still close to their children that I was seriously considering making a new law forbidding mothers from touching their sons! But I suppose that won't be necessary! Oh-ho-ho!"

Apparently, they had narrowly avoided a descent into despotism that would

have threatened families everywhere. Seemingly thoroughly satisfied, the queen got back in her luxurious carriage and was chauffeured away.

Masato and Mamako saw her off.

“Our first job was a success! Great!”

“You call that great?! The two of you spent ages chattering about nothing... and it destroyed the rest of us.”

He pointed behind the counter, where the girls had all fallen asleep. He’d barely resisted the urge himself. Over an hour of small talk would do that.

The only thing that kept him conscious was his irritation.

“Mom, there’s one thing I’m worried about... Is half-assed advice like that really what you want to give?”

“Oh? What was ‘half-assed’ about it?”

“You made it sound like if the prince and queen went shopping together, she’d be able to spoil him. But let’s be clear, that’ll never happen. No way. Absolutely impossible.”

“Not true! I’m sure the prince really wants the queen to spoil him.”

“Based on what?”

“A mother’s instincts.” *Ding!* ☆

“Hoo boy.”

So nothing, basically? He was about to start yelling, when...

...another luxurious carriage stopped outside the shop. No, the queen hadn’t come back.

“Pardon me. Do you have a moment?”

A handsome young man in gorgeous clothing came in, flanked by several guards.

He had a refined air to him that marked him as more than just your average rich man. And his guards had that “mind your manners or be executed” vibe, too.

“Um... Wait, are you...?”

“Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Prince of Catharn. A sadly ridiculous name, I realize. Ha-ha-ha.”

“So...you’re the prince here?”

“Yes, it is as you say. Let me get down to business. If I might inquire—is this shop offering consultations on relationships with mothers?”

“It certainly is!”

“I thought as much! The moment I saw the name, I wondered—in that case, please, listen to my troubles! I’m begging you!”

That stupid sign had dragged in more royalty.

A handsome prince, in their shop.

You’d assume the girls would go wild, but...

“Order up! Tea for three!”

“The snacks are ready!”

“I’ll bring them out, then.”

They didn’t seem impressed at all. Just businesslike efficiency. Professionalism. Didn’t seem fazed by the handsome face at all.

“Well, Masato, as an employee of the Mom Shop, please do your best!”

“The moment this battle ends, I’m handing in my resignation.”

Unexpected support from his reliable party member Medhi. Masato took his seat next to Mamako. At the request of the prince, he was to hear the royal issue.

“Right... Your Highness, what seems to be the problem?”

“It’s about my mother spoiling me.”

“You seem very tense.”

“Fact of the matter is that it seems like my mother wants to spoil me all the

time.”

“Uh, yeah, I’d gathered...”

She’d said so herself. But...

The prince looked older than Masato. He was already a grown man.

“Uh, so... But for someone your age, you can’t just let them spoil you, right?”

“Nonsense! I would love nothing more!”

“So why do you look even more tense?!”

“I just have no idea how to go about doing that! I’m at my wit’s end. What is the right way to be spoiled? Please, I need your help!”

“I don’t believe you should beg for these things. Please, leave while you still can.”

Masato tried a polite refusal, but...

“There’s nothing to fret about!” Mamako said. “Just act on your feelings and allow her to spoil you!”

“Wait, Mom, what are you saying? Spoiling is bad!”

“But I always want to spoil you, Ma-kun. Hee-hee!”

“That’s just how *you* feel!”

“Th-that’s right... You are a mother, Mamako. Masato, how do you allow her to spoil you?”

“Me? Well, obviously...”

He was about to insist he did no such thing, but he hit the brakes on the thought.

Hmm, come to think of it...

They’d just given the queen advice on this same subject.

If Masato remained anti-spoiling, and the prince failed to respond...

...The queen would be disappointed. And she might really pass that law against physical contact...or worse...

The queen's anger might target the Mom Shop for giving bad advice.

Would she execute all staff? Off with their heads?

"Ma-kun, you've turned pale! Are you feeling well?"

"I-I'm fine! Don't worryyyy!"

He definitely wasn't fine.

This was life or death. Their very lives were on the line!

Fine! To save the kingdom and our necks, I've gotta do it!

Masato moved around behind Mamako, summoning his courage. If he didn't have to face her...

He gently put his arms around her.

"Oh my! A piggyback hug? Ma-kun! You're such a mama's boy! Hee-hee!"

Mamako's skill, A Mother's Light, activated. Her whole body glowed. Much too bright, but he did his best to withstand it.

"Y-Your Highness! I think something like this is doable! Seems to have worked on my mom anyway! Give it a shot sometime!"

"Oh, I see! This is very educational!"

The prince seemed impressed.

Masato glanced behind him. Porta's smile was totally pure, but Wise's grin was definitely malicious, and Medhi was clearly sniggering. Why didn't they just kill him?

But Masato had people to save, no matter what personal sacrifice that required.

He felt like he was finally playing the role of a Hero, but the rest of him was still going "Not like this, though!"

With the prince's problem resolved and his duty fulfilled, Masato went to breathe a sigh of— He didn't get a chance.

“Does this shop consult on parent/child problems?!”

“Please, listen! My son won’t let me dote on him...”

“Not in a *weird* way. I just want Mom to spoil me like a normal kid, but how?”

Customer after customer poured into the Mom Shop.

“Oh, Ma-kun! Time to do our duty as the heroic family! Don’t worry! I’m sure you can do it! You’re a Hero, Ma-kun!”

“Argh! Put that way, I have to! But this is the last time! Seriously, never again!”

He said this for the next twenty consultations.

“Parents who want to spoil their children, children who want to be spoiled but hesitate to ask for it directly... How can we solve their problems? Well, Ma-kun?”

“Argh! Fine! Deploy the Oosuki Technique—the piggyback hug!”

Every problem was solved with Masato and Mamako’s demonstration.

Now he was on a Labor Department–mandated break.

“This doesn’t make sense... No way so many people want to be spoiled... It’s insane...”

Having completely worn himself out, Masato was collapsed on a table, pointedly ignoring Wise and Medhi, who clearly were longing to mess with him.

“...We have to close the store.”

“There you go again! You know you like it.”

“You get to solve people’s problems and let Mamako spoil you! Isn’t that nice? Heh-heh-heh.”

“I! Am sacrificing! My dignity! To help! These people!”

“Good job, Masato! Here’s a treat!”

“Oh, thanks. You’re my one salvation, Porta.”

With a grateful look, he bit into the treat, his mood restored by the sugar.

But this was no time to lie around. Masato sprang to his feet.

“Mom! Can we talk?”

“Oh? What is it? Do you want to give me another squeeze?”

“None of those hugs qualified as a squeeze! And no, not that.”

He was ready to burst a blood vessel—but better to stay calm.

“Mom,” he said quietly. “Let’s go over what the purpose of this shop is again.”

“Yes, okay.”

“Shiraaase hired us to support parent/child relationships.”

“Yes, she did! Exactly right!”

“But I’m certain Shiraaase had support in mind for test-player relationships. Naturally! If NPC families have problems, they can just adjust their settings!”

“That’s... Is that true?”

“It is! So let’s add *Test players only* or *No NPCs, please!* to the sign! That’ll fix it!”

The double royal visit—and the flood of ordinary NPCs afterward—had Mom Shop business booming in a bad way. They’d never be able to keep up.

The Oosuki Technique was whittling away at Masato’s endurance and mental fortitude, and he couldn’t keep doing that all day.

He at least had to reduce the number of demonstrations.

“Hmm... I don’t think it matters if you’re a test player, an NPC, or spoiled rotten. I think if all parents and children are close, then everyone is happy. Hee-hee.”

“Please, these things matter! And acting spoiled rotten is a third option that is clearly mental!”

Mamako seemed to be really enjoying this. The more the merrier. As great a toll as the Oosuki Technique took on Masato, it only powered Mamako up. She looked eager for the next customer to arrive.

But then...

“...Um, are you free?”

“Eeeeeek?! Another spoiling?!”

The new customer was an exhausted-looking middle-aged woman.

“I saw the shop sign and thought you might be able to help me with my problem.”

“Yes. Let’s hear it!”

“No, wait! If she says ‘How can I spoil my child more?’ I can’t handle it!”

“Uh, no, that’s not... It’s the other way around.”

“Huh? You mean...”

“My daughter wants me to spoil her too much! It’s a real problem. I don’t know what to do! I feel like a failure...”

Neither wanting to spoil nor be spoiled. A third type of consultation!

“Your daughter is too spoiled? Can you tell us how?”

“It’s a bit hard to explain... Could you come to my house and observe my daughter for yourselves? Please, I think that would be best.”

There was no way Mamako would reject a plea like that.

The woman’s name was Leene.

Since she wanted them to see her daughter in person, Masato’s party had come to her home.

“Here we are. Come on in.”

They were in a neat little residential area, the kind of place people live in when they have money but not *that* much.

Leene’s house alone was conspicuously run-down.

The place had clearly had a number of makeshift repairs done with random planks or bits of wood. The garden and yard were a sight, as if everything had been violently uprooted.

“Like something went on a rampage through here... What happened?”

“O-oh, nothing! I just...haven’t been able to look after the place as well as I... L-let me introduce you to my daughter! This way!”

This was clearly way beyond a failure to look after the place.

Leene was obviously flustered. She hastily opened the door...

“Mommy! I was good while I was all by myself! You promised you’d give me a head rub if I looked after the house! ...Oh?!” A bizarre creature had come tearing out of a back room, but she screeched to a halt, gasping loudly. “G-guests?! Nice to meet you! My name’s Mone!” This polite greeting out of the way, she muttered, “Whew... Close one.”

Leene’s daughter, Mone. Fifteen years old.

At first glance, she clearly qualified as cute.

Normally, I’d be all “At last, my heroine has arrived,” but...

But this was a problem child so into being spoiled it actively alarmed her mother.

They were led to a living room—like the exterior, the inside had obviously been hastily patched up. Even the couch they were sitting on. Leene provided tea and cake and was about to start explaining, when...

“Hngggg... I just can’t! I can’t wait anymore! Mommy! Mommyyy!”

Mone collapsed sideways against her mother, rubbing her face on Leene’s lap.

“Er...Mone? This is an important conversation, so—”

“That’s okay! I’ll listen on Mommy’s lap!”

“Th-that’s not... Sit up properly, and...”

“Mommy! I want some cake! Feed me some? Ahhh!”

“I—I think you can feed yourself.”

“But it tastes better if you feed it to me! Ahhhh!”

Leene reluctantly started feeding her daughter, looking ready to burst into

tears. Clearly at a loss.

Faced with the sheer degree of Mone's spoiling, Wise, Medhi, and even Porta and Mamako looked aghast. They had to step in.

"This is a job for the Mom Shop. What do we do?"

"W-well, we could hit her in the head really hard?" suggested Wise. "It might make her sane again."

"I agree. I volunteer to take care of—"

"Eek!" yelped Porta. "Medhi, I think your bash damage will just hurt her a lot..."

"That's right. Violence is not the answer."

"Fair enough, I suppose. So what *do* we do?"

Mamako frowned, thinking about that.

"Loving your mother is never a bad thing, but...it's a matter of degree. Hmm. I think it would be best if we could find a more appropriate distance..."

"Yeah. Appropriate is the right word."

"Yes! Like, this far!"

Mamako moved closer to Masato, casually wrapping her arm around his.

"Yeah, sure, this far...is already too close!"

"Oh, it is? Mommy thinks this is perfect!"

"I don't! No son ever wants to be this close!"

Mamako could not be relied on for these things. At all.

He extracted himself carefully, managing to avoid unfortunate contact.

"But distance is definitely important. And the one who'll teach that is...Wise!"

"Ha! My turn, at last! Leave it to me!"

Wise and her mother had enough distance that they could fight. It might be a tad violent, but it wasn't a bad relationship at all.

Wise stood up with a ton of confidence. "Right; you there, sorry!" She forced

herself between Mone and Leene, plunking down between them.

Instantly, Mone scowled, screaming “Hey! Don’t get between my mommy and me!”

“Yeah, yeah, my bad...but there’s no need to get *that* angry!”

“There is! This is unforgivable! Attempting to sever the bond between Mommy and me is downright diabolical! You leave me no choice... Hyah!”

Mad with rage, Mone attacked!

Putting all her power in her hands, Mone grabbed Wise’s sides!

“Evil spirit, I banish thee!”

“Wait, stop tha—ha-ha-ha-ha-ha?!”

Her sides under attack, Wise slid off the couch, rolling on the floor laughing. No matter how much she struggled, there was no escaping Mone’s tickle assault.

The sight of Wise’s agonized face was far sadder than the panties she was inadvertently flashing, so Masato was forced to look away.

Five minutes later...

“S-stop... I was wrong...” Wise went limp.

“The evil is defeated! Family ties win again!”

The battle was over. Mone roared in victory. “Mommyyyy!” She flung her arms around Leene again.

The plan to pry them apart physically had failed.

“I knew Wise couldn’t do it. Oh well. It *is* Wise.”

“Oh, go to hell... You could have stepped in and helped me, y’know!”

“Next up... Medhi!”

“Wise is the weakest of us. I’ll show you what real power means!”

The next assassin stepped forward.

Medhi stood next to Leene and put her arm around her shoulders.

“Mone, listen close. I’m going to tell you what your mother is really thinking.”

“What Mommy is really thinking? Oooh, I wanna know!”

Medhi didn’t actually *have* a mind reading skill, but she was sure acting like it, making a show of concentrating, speaking slowly.

“Your mother thinks... ‘Mone is my daughter and obviously important to me, but...’”

“But?”

“She’s very worried that you’re *too* spoiled.”

“What? Mommy thinks I’m too spoiled? I don’t see how that can be true. I mean, Mommy’s never said anything like that to me!”

“It seems like she’s one of those people who can’t bring themselves to share how they really feel. But deep down, she definitely thinks that way. Right, Leene?”

Leene hesitated but gave a very small nod. Medhi was speaking for her.

If this could talk sense into Mone...

“Also, she definitely thinks having you be that clingy is creepy. She thinks there’s something wrong with you.”

“Whaaaat?! Mommy thinks *that* about me?!”

“Wait, Medhi! That’s how *you* feel!”

“Oh, whoops.”

Her native dark side had added a bit too much venom.

Leene was shaking her head. She would never go that far.

It was over.

“Mommy says she doesn’t! ...*Hnggg*... You tried to trick me! Unforgivable!”

“No, um, calm down! We can talk this out! If—”

“No ifs! Hyah!”

“Wai— Heeeeeeee?!”

Mad with rage, Mone attacked again!

Her sides violently assaulted, Medhi's beautiful features crumpled, and she was left rolling on the floor—until she landed on the ground next to the half-dead Wise. She didn't move again.

"Ha! You lose!"

Mone threw up a victory sign and then threw her arms around Leene again.

A fearsome foe.

"Medhi failed, too? Oh well. It *is* Medhi."

"I take offense to that! ...But I must admit defeat."

"Leave the rest to us. Take a break, you did a great job."

To ease her slumber, he helped pull her skirt back down. Such a gentleman, Masato! RIP, white panties.

"Forcibly prying them away and taking the mother's side both ended in failure. What next?"

"Um, Ma-kun, perhaps Mommy could..."

"Mom, you're wholeheartedly in favor of spoiling, so I feel that would just backfire. Stay out of this one."

"Oh no... Mommy's sad now..."

"Yeah, yeah, knock it off."

Mamako had leaned closer, crying crocodile tears, but Masato gently pushed her away.

"Masato! I have an idea!" Porta said, her hand shooting up.

"Oh, Porta! You're joining the battle? So brave!"

"Er? Um, well... I..."

Porta looked down at the older girls' agonized expressions.

A look of fear passed over her face, and tears welled up in her eyes.

"O-okay!" she said, shaking like a leaf. "Here I go, off to my death!"

“No, wait! I’m kidding! That was a joke! You don’t need to die! I really don’t want to see you laugh yourself to death... You said you had an idea? Can we hear it?”

“R-right! I do!”

“Good, go on! Lay your idea on us, Porta! What is it you think we should do?”

“I think we just need to get Mone to change!”

“Hmm...right...”

She was the source of the problem. Only she could fix it.

“But how do we convince her to change? We need something more specific...”

“I think you should explain how you feel, Masato!”

“How I feel? But that’s...”

“You and Mama are very close! You’re the best family! I think if you tell her how you feel, that will do the trick!”

“Okay, Porta. Back up.”

He glanced at Mamako, and she was nodding a lot. She needed to back up, too.

“Lemme clarify. Mom and I aren’t that close...”

“You totally are! We see how you act around each other every day! We know better.”

“How do you do it? I think it’s a very good idea to have you explain how it feels from the child’s perspective.”

Wise and Medhi had returned to the world of the living and piled on.

He felt like they were just hoping he’d fail and be sentenced to the hell of tickles like they had.

But then Leene joined in. “Yes... If you can give her advice from a child’s point of view, I think my daughter would have to consider it. Will you please try?”

“Er? S-seriously? Me? Do I have to?”

Expectant looks from everyone. Argh.

“...Hngg...”

Mone’s hackles were raised, like a wild animal. Facing her—the hero, Masato. A battle for the spoils.

Masato and Mone were in the yard.

He glanced back and saw the others clustered in the window, watching intently. Too much attention.

This was really, really awkward.

“Um, if you have something to say, just spit it out?”

“Uh, yeah. Sure.”

“And just to be clear, I’m only listening because Mommy asked me to. Don’t get the wrong idea.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

“And if my supply of spoiling isn’t replenished regularly, things get real ugly.”

“Noted. Geez, you can’t just say whatever...”

Ignoring that nonsense...

Masato looked her in the eye. She glared balefully back. He chose his words carefully.

“Where should I start...? Um... So how do you feel about Leene...?”

“I love her, obviously! Geez! Don’t make me spit it out!”

“Uh, right. Sure.”

“But not, like, love in a weird way? She’s my mommy, and I love her like one!”

“Okay... Sure, that’s a relief.”

She might have a few screws loose, but she more or less had all her marbles. There might still be some salvation here.

“Then if the mom you love so much had a problem, what would you do?”

“I’d do something about that problem, of course!”

“Then let’s do that. Leene is...upset? Annoyed? ...Er, no—she’s worried about you.”

“Huh? Why? I haven’t done anything to make her—”

“But you have. You’re too spoiled. Leene’s so worried she asked us to come help.”

“Oh...”

Mone spun around and stared at her mother.

Leene could probably hear them talking. Once again, she gave a very small nod.

“So what are you gonna do about it?” Masato asked. “The mom you love so much has a problem. How are you going to solve that?”

“Th-that’s... But... How...?”

“It’s simple.”

Masato glanced at Mamako. She had that same smile.

He just needed to say the words he had within him.

“My mom worries about me way too much. She’s always fussing over me, doing things for me—it happens all the time. And I don’t want to make her worry.”

“Th-then...what do you do? How do you handle it?”

“Simple. I act in a way that I think will show her she doesn’t need to worry.”

Whether that was true was another matter.

“I try to show her I can do anything, without her advice, that I’m independent. That’s the key.”

“Independent...”

“I’m just guessing here, but...I think that’s what’s got Leene worried.”

“Am...am I not independent?”

“I’m sure she doesn’t dislike spoiling you, but when you’re clinging to her all the time...that’s concerning. Will you be able to go out in the world, get a job, a boyfriend, get married? I imagine she’s worried about all of that. That’s how parents think.”

Boyfriends and marriage carried a whole other set of problems.

This is all just how I imagine it, but...I think I’m right?

Just to be sure, he stole a glance at Leene. She was nodding firmly, like he’d hit the nail on the head. Cool.

Feeling like he’d gained a glimpse into the parental mind, he continued talking, quite proud of himself.

“So what are you going to do? How do you want to handle this?”

“I...really don’t want to worry Mommy. So I need to prove to her that she doesn’t have to worry about me.”

“Yeah, good. Do that.”

“So... Mm, first, I should get a job and prove to Mommy that I can work!”

“Nice! Always good. Labor is your duty, citizen.”

“And then I’ll get a boyfriend! I’ll show her I can date a boy!”

“Yeah, get a boyfriend! Literally anyone but me.”

It wasn’t that he didn’t think she was cute.

It was just that dating someone who doted on her mom this much seemed like a chore.

“Well, I think if she was dating a boy who had his feet as firmly on the ground as you do, I’d never have to worry! Heh-heh-heh!” Leene had come out in the garden specifically to alarm him.

Mamako followed her. “If you need a place to work, how about our Mom Shop?”

“Oooh, nice idea!” said Wise. “We can’t be there all the time.”

“We would be incredibly grateful if you could open up the shop, listen to customers’ problems, and contact us when we’re needed,” added Medhi.

“If you assisted us at the shop, it would help both us and the people in trouble!” agreed Porta.

“If my daughter was working at your shop, that would be a big relief! Right, Mone? What do you think?”

“No, um, wait? Please wait?” Masato said. This was all happening way too fast.

But Mone?

“Sure! It’s settled! I’ll prove I’m independent, so you don’t have to worry! I’ll go work there! And then...get a boyfriend!”

She shot Masato a meaningful look.

And it really happened.

“Um, Shiraaase? You can just say no...”

“It was a careless oversight on my part. It would never do for a support facility to be closed all the time. I think having Mone watch over the shop while you’re away is a very good idea. We’ll make her an official employee and pay her an appropriate wage.”

She had the authority to make it all official.

“Then...once again! I’m Mone! Thanks for having me!”

Their new employee bowed. Good manners, cheerful, definitely a cute girl.

Except...

“But I’m surprised you managed to discover a secret boss and befriend her.”

“Huh?”

“Her real name is Mammone, the dark god. She was created as the boss for a high-level quest, but the quest’s actual story creation has been delayed, so we placed her in an ordinary household as their daughter...”

“Again: Huh?!”

What was Shiraaase talking about?

“W-wait... Mone’s a secret boss?! What the hell?! You can’t put a character that powerful in a random house in the starting village! ...Argh, none of this makes sense!”

“There was nothing else we could do. And the power hidden within her is extremely unique...”

But before she could say another word...

...Mone suddenly let out a groan and fell to her knees. “Urrghh...”

“Hey, what’s going on?!” asked Wise.

“Are you sick?” said Medhi.

“Oh no!” cried Porta. “I’ll get some medicine!”

“No, that’s not it... The whole spoiled thing wasn’t just me acting spoiled, it was also a way to seal in my power... If my mother doesn’t spoil me...”

If her heart was not fulfilled, the power of her cravings emerged.

The tables and chairs around Mone began sliding toward her—then so did the people in the room.

Then a potted plant touched Mone and crumbled into dust, all of it absorbed into her body.

“Yo, seriously?! If she isn’t doted on, she turns into a black hole?! Then the reason her house was a mess was... Look, we gotta do something!”

“Right! Then I’ll just have to spoil her myself!”

“No, Wise! You’re the demon who forced her way between Mommy and me! I don’t want you to spoil me!”

“If Wise is no good, then I’ll—”

“No, Medhi! You’re a blackhearted con artist! I don’t want you to spoil me!”

“Then what about me?”

“Porta? ...Mm, you’re not so bad...but being spoiled by someone younger

than me is kinda...”

“The situation’s dire, and here she’s being super-picky! What a piece of work!”

But then the star of the show stepped in.

“Then how about me? Mone, dear, come to Mommy!”

Mamako held her arms open wide. “Mom!” “Mamako!” “Mama!” For some reason, the three girls all jumped in first.

Mone almost ran into her embrace but managed to stand her ground.

“Argh! No! If I let Mamako spoil me, I’ll be letting my mother spoil me! ...After all, you’ll eventually be my mother-in-law!”

“Hell no, she won’t! I won’t let that happen! I refuse!”

“Which means...the only one here... Hee-hee! Masatooo!”

“Stop it!”

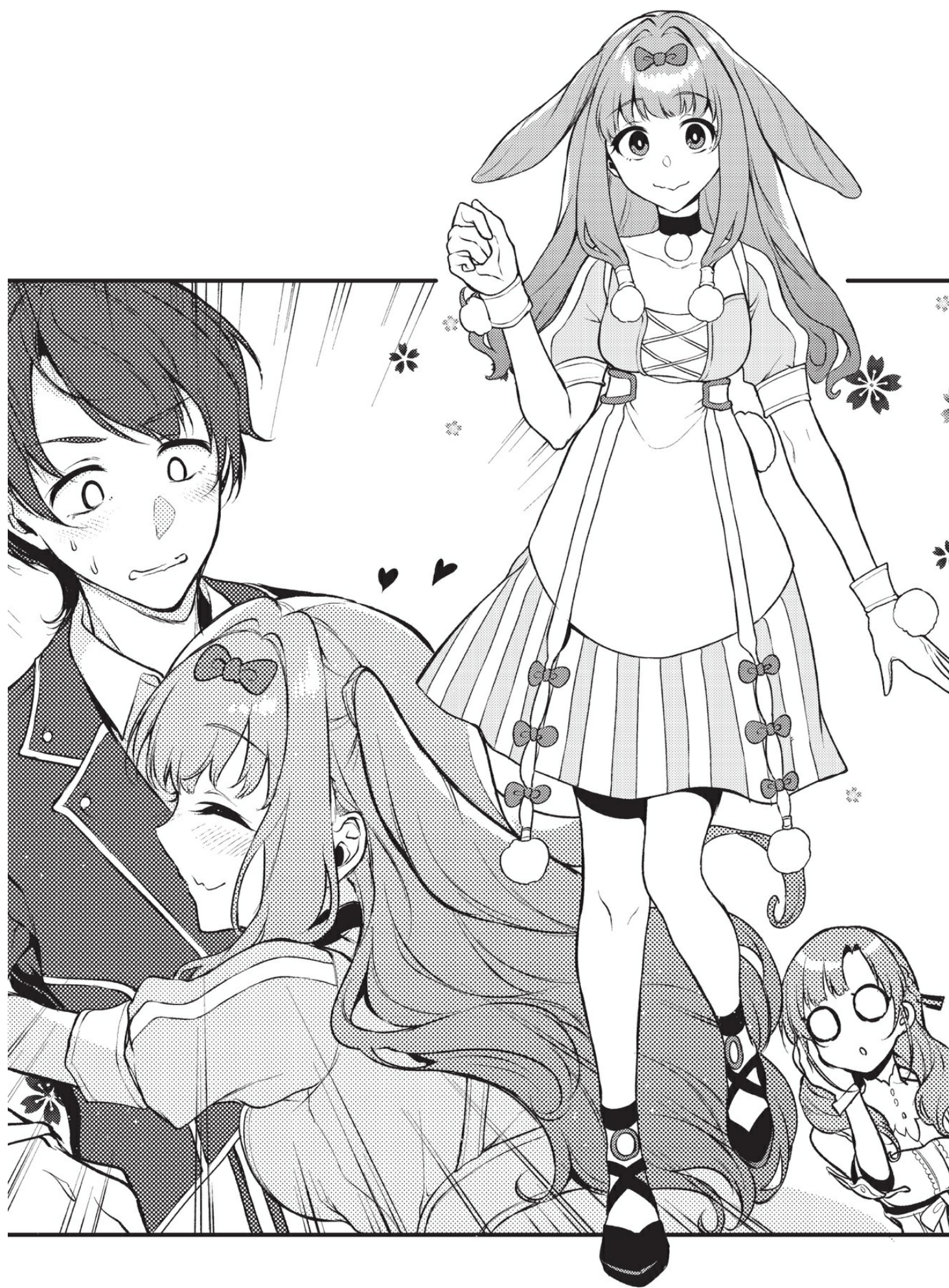
“I won’t! After all, you’re my boyfriend!”

“I never agreed to that!”

“Doesn’t matter if you do! My mind’s made up! *Rub, rub. Rub, rub.*”

Mone threw her arms around Masato, rubbing her cheek on his chest. Very spoiled.

But this spoiling seemed to control the power inside her. The destructive gravitational pull subsided.



But she was still clinging to Masato.

“Mm—heh-heh. Masatooo...” *Rub, rub.*

“Argh... She smells good, too...”

“Well, don’t leave me out! Mommy wants to rub Ma-kun, too!”

“Don’t you join in, Mom!”

“This looks like fun. Perhaps I should let Masato dote on me?”

“Shiraaase, you’re just doing that out of spite! S-someone! Help! Free me from this spoiled hell!”

Despite Masato’s desperate screams, Porta simply smiled happily—and Wise and Medhi uncomfortably.

Outside the Mom Shop...

A pair of very suspicious figures were peering in the window, heedless of the attention they were drawing from passersby.

“Look at them happily goofing off with not a care in the world. Infuriating.”

“Masato, the center of attentiooon? That’s unuuusual. Downright bizaaaarre!”

One was a girl with a face as fierce as any tiger.

The other affected a look of languid superiority.

They were two of the Four Heavenly Kings of the Libere Rebellion, Amante and Sorella.

Glaring up at the Mom Shop sign, Amante bared her teeth.

“I thought it was weird when they suddenly shot off to Catharn, but to open a mom shop?! We have to assume they intend this as a slap in the face.”

“We reject the existence of motheeers! This is extremely distuuurbing.”

“Exactly! We have to shut this place down—and pronto! But...”

They both peered into the shop again.

Inside was Mamako, the unrivaled World's Best Mom title holder; Wise and Medhi, who had once backed them into a corner; and the newly revealed secret boss, Mone. Also, Porta.

Shiraaase and Masato were there, too, but they weren't worth paying attention to.

A cold sweat pouring down their faces, both Heavenly Kings shrank back.

"L-look, it's not like I don't see any path to victory against those combined forces! I'm not scared of them or anything!"

"R-riiiight! It's juuuust...we're outnuumbered...and that's hardly faaaair."

"E-exactly! That's it! So...we need a plan or... Oh, I know! This shop... If we just... Right, and then..."

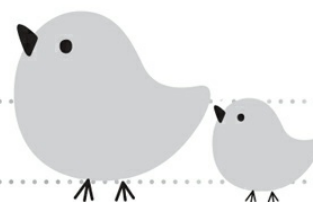
"You have an ideaaaaa? Let's hear iiiiiit!"

"Time is of the essence. Now's the time for action! Let's go! ...Mamako Oosuki...you'll never imagine that your own reputation will be the very noose that hangs you! Heh-heh-heh! Mwa-ha-ha-ha!"

Amante and Sorella turned their backs on the Mom Shop and sprang into action.

Mom Consultation Forum 3

Mama's BBS



Question

Submitted by: PIITA



The Mom Shop is open! I want to help any way I can!
What should I do?!

Answer

MAMAKO



This question is from the Piita doll hanging from Porta's bag, right? I wonder how we should have Piita help!

PORTA



I'll— I mean, Piita will do anything! She may not be great at doing things alone, though...

MAMAKO



Well, what about making her the shop mascot? She can hold the tea-and-snack menu on the table and greet customers.

PORTA



Oh! That's a perfect job for Piita! I can make a menu for her to hold right away! Leave that to me!

Chapter 5 “Courtship Is Basically an Interview, Right?” I Said, and the Girls All Looked Disgusted. Baffling.

Perfect questing weather.

They’d accepted a job to dispatch some monsters attacking local chickens.

Once they reached the chicken coop in question, Masato’s party prepared for battle—by readying bait to lure out their targets.

“Mom, about this bait you prepared...”

“They said the monster was feline, so I made something a cat would love!”

“You got real hung up on that cat thing, huh? Argh... If only I’d noticed sooner, this would never have happened...”

The bait in Masato’s hand was clearly, beyond all doubt...

Neko-manma. Mamako’s special “cat rice”—a pile of bonito flakes over a bowl of rice.

He put it on the ground, and they hid in the shadow of the coop, waiting.

“What kind of kitty is it?!” Mamako said, excited.

“It’s not a cat! It’s a monster. Argh, this thing is never gonna show. We should’ve just used normal meat... Monsters aren’t going to eat *neko-manma*...”

“Mm? Hang on. Something’s coming out of the forest...”

“That was quick. Good catch, Wise,” said Medhi. “Porta, can you see anything?”

“That’s... Whoa! It’s a saber-toothed tiger! And it’s really fast!”

“You’re kidding, right?! The *neko-manma* worked?! On a saber-toothed tiger?!”

The scent of the *neko-manma* wafted through the air—and a ferocious beast with massive tusks was making a beeline for it.

“A full-on carnivore is seriously targeting some fish flakes on a bowl of rice! I guess that’s not our primary concern, though. That thing’s bad news! One blow from that would mean instant death!”

“Masato, you take the hit! It’s all yours!”

“Don’t worry, I’ll bring you back to life right away!”

“I was gonna suggest we try dodging, actually?!”

Wise and Medhi had hidden themselves behind Masato, clutching his clothes and using him as a human shield. “Perfect.” “Porta, just in case, you’d better join us.” “O-okay!” The other two were dubious, but with Porta behind him, he couldn’t exactly shirk his tanking duties.

“Geez! The one time anyone relies on me... But I guess I’m not really complaining!”

He could do this. He was a hero who could be relied upon.

The saber-toothed tiger spied a bigger meal—Masato—and took aim.

Masato held out his left arm, deploying his shield wall, and grimly braced for the attack!

“Oh my! That’s not a kitty, it’s a dangerous monster! In that case... Hyah!”

Mamako attacked. Two multi-target attacks, rock spikes and water bullets, all hit home, and the saber-toothed tiger was instantly vanquished! “Yeah, I knew it.” Masato nodded and lowered his arm.

The battle was over. Quest complete.

“The monster dropped a mountain of gems! I’ll collect them!”

“All yours. Then I guess I’ll clean up the *neko-manma*. Mom? Chopsticks and soy sauce?”

“Oh, here! I also brought tea.”

“Cool.”

“Now we just have to report this to the guild,” said Wise. “...That sure wrapped up quick.”

“This quest was our only goal for the day, so...we’ve got a lot of free time now,” said Medhi.

“Yeah... What else should we do?” Masato thought about it while he ate the *neko-manma*.

Then Mamako clapped her hands. “Why don’t we check in on the Mom Shop?”

Several days had passed since they’d opened it for business.

While they were away, they’d left Mone in charge, but...

“Yeah... Couldn’t hurt to check.”

He definitely had concerns. He polished off the *neko-manma* and was ready to go.

A quick swing by the adventurer’s guild to turn in the quest, and...

“...Right, definitely Catharn. Thanks, Wise!”

“Sure, sure. My magic’s the best.”

“Let’s go check on our shop! Yay!”

Wise’s transport spell had dropped them at the entrance to the Catharn capital. With Mamako’s cry, they set out, headed for the Mom Shop.

“I do hope Mone’s okay...,” Mamako said.

“She’s fine,” Masato reassured her. “Shiraaase said she’d help out if it got to be too much for her.”

“This is fundamentally management’s job anyway,” added Wise. “She’s got this.”

“I’m more worried about Mone’s power than the shop...,” said Medhi.

“If Masato’s not there to dote on her, her powers will spiral out of control! I’m very worried!” exclaimed Porta.

“I’d definitely rather not have a fatal blow hit the town on my watch...but it doesn’t look like we have anything to be worried about. Catharn is clearly safe

and sound!”

The town was definitely still here. No signs of any destruction from Mone’s black hole power. There were plenty of people in the street, young and old. Mostly women.

A huge crowd formed a line from the town entrance into the distance.

“What is this? Some sort of event or...? Wait...”

Masato had paused in his tracks, but his body started moving on its own.

He was still standing upright, but his feet were being dragged parallel to the ground. And getting faster. “Whoa?!” “Ah! Ma-kun!” Mamako hastily reached out—but too late. Masato was sliding away down the street.

“H-holy craaaaap?! The hell is going on?! It’s like something’s pulling me in!! Whyyy?!”

He was dragged all the way to the commercial district, following the line of people. Then he hit a sharp curve. “Wahhhh!” The sideways g-force nearly snapped his neck, but on he went.

He could see the front of the line now. It ended at the Mom Shop.

“All these people are Mom Shop customers?! There’s an ON BREAK sign on the door, but... Wait; I’m about to smack right into it!!”

The shop windows were right in front of him, but he wasn’t even slowing down. “Mmph!” He smacked up against them, flattened. But still, he didn’t stop. “Mwaaaaa?!” The window was cracked open, and the force was trying to drag him in through it.

And once inside...

“I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t!”

Mone was curled up behind the counter, staring at her feet, dead-eyed, repeating the same words over and over.

Clearly terminal.

“I can’t, I can’t, I...I c-can’t?! ...I...c-c-casatooooo!!”

“*Masato*, not Casato! So you’re the one who dragged me here? You’ve

developed the power to drag only the one you want spoiling you?! Nobody asked for this annoying turn of events—!”

“People! So many peopleeeee! One after another! Aughhhh!”

“Sheesh! You’re in no state to talk, huh?”

Mone had burst into tears and flung her arms around him. With the force of ten thousand men. Emergency spoil charge!

While that happened, the rest of the party caught up.

“Ma-kun, are you okay?! ...Oh my! Mone? What’s wrong with her?”

“Your guess is as good as mine... But given the insane crowd outside, maybe the volume got to be too much for her, and she panicked?”

“I can’t take it anymooooore! It’s too muuuuch! Wahhh!”

“There, there,” said Masato. “Just calm down, Mone... I’m sure you did great, right?”

“Uh-huh! Most people were worried about spoiling, and I know more about that than anyone, so I was able to help them all!”

“Then we were right to leave you in charge,” said Mamako. “Still...”

“Yes! The last few days, the number of customers has gone up and up! And I couldn’t handle it anymore! Wahhhh!”

“Please don’t cry! It’s okay now! You’ll be okay!”

Mamako and Porta both patted Mone on the back. But Mone wasn’t calming down.

Wise and Medhi hesitantly reached to pat her back, too...

“Come on, no more crying...”

“Mone, please calm down.”

“Oh, don’t you dare! I don’t need a demon and a con artist comforting me!”

“Wow, this girl can hold a grudge...”

“She really does have it out for us.”

She'd sounded super-calm for a moment there.

And that did seem to lead to an overall improvement.

"Sorry, Masato. I really lost control... *Sniff...*"

"Don't worry about it. Happens to everyone. No one could handle that many customers all on their own. This place has always been booming, but for the number of patrons to grow this explosively... I wonder why?"

"I think this is the cause. Some of the customers brought it. They're being handed out all over town."

Mone held up a flyer.

An ad for the Mom Shop. There was a map, and the business hours, and a brief description of services.

And in very big letters, the alarming phrase:

IF WE CAN'T SOLVE YOUR PROBLEMS, MAMAKO OOSUKI WILL TAKE RESPONSIBILITY AND QUIT BEING A MOTHER!

"Yo... Mom, what is this? You're passing these out?"

"Mommy doesn't know anything! I certainly didn't ask for these..."

"Then who's passing this stuff out? Why would anyone just...? Hmm?"

At the very bottom of the flyer was some fine print.

PRINTING: LIBERE REBELLION.

CONTACT: AMANTE OR SORELLA

And there was a symbol on it—the kanji for *Mom* written upside down.

"For a society of evil, they sure are sticklers for advertising laws... An impressive show of stupidity."

"Ms. Shiraaase stopped by earlier and said the same thing. She left, saying she'd handle it...and that I'd better close the shop in the meantime. So I did."

"Okay...then we'll leave the idiots to Shiraaase. And we'd better take care of this."

He glared at the line outside. "Are they still not open?" "This is urgent!" "My children won't let me spoil them!" "I want my mother to spoil me!" The crowd

was growing impatient and knocking on the door and windows.

“Even if the flyers are fake, these people are here with real problems they need solved. We can’t exactly send them away...”

“That’s right! The Mom Shop is here to solve their problems!”

“Okay. Then if we just correct the part about you quitting being a mom if you can’t—”

“Hold up,” interrupted Wise. “I just had a thought... Wouldn’t it be way more fun if we *didn’t* correct that?”

“We’d destroy the Rebellion’s plans head-on... Yes, that would be delightful!” concurred Medhi.

“I agree! Mama and Masato’s ultimate technique will defeat these people’s problems and the Four Kings!”

“Er... Uh, I mean... I do like facing people down and emerging victorious, but...”

The burden of being spoiled took too great a toll on Masato.

“Oh, I know! Mone could get in some payback by teaming up with Mom!”

“I’ll go sort the customers’ problems! If they have similar ones, we can resolve them in batches!”

Mone ran out of the shop. She was very fast.

The rest of the girls went behind the counter, preparing refreshments. They were very fast.

Masato bit his lip, and Mamako took her place next to him. Also very fast.

“Come, Ma-kun. You and Mommy are going to work so hard! Hee-hee.”

“Argh... Fine! I get it! I’ll do it! It’s my job!”

With that nigh-apathetic declaration, they opened for business.

The customers came filing in, demanding their troubles be resolved!

“How can I make my children let me dote on them naturally?”

“It’s best to use a lap pillow! Ma-kun, demonstrate?”

“Y-yaaay! Catnip for kids! ...Oh, I’m so sleepy... Zzz...”

“How can I subtly get my mother to spoil me?”

“Just link your arm with hers when you’re walking together! Right, Ma-kun?”

“Right on! I’ll escort you to the store, Mom! Come this way!”

Demonstrating their bonds won over one and all...

The sun had set at last.

Over three hundred customers had come to the Mom Shop that day.

They’d resolved each and every problem, but the toll was immense.

“I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t!”

“M-Ma-kun! You’re fine now! That was the last customer!”

“You did great, Masato! As a reward, I’ll rub your head for you! Let me spoil you!”

“Huh? ...Spoil? *Spoil?!?*”

“Masato! Here are some sweets and a soda! Nothing like spoiling yourself when you’re exhausted!”

“Eeeek! I’ve had enough spoiling to last me a lifetiiiiime!”

He and Mamako had demonstrated proper spoiling techniques so many times it had damaged his very mind. Being spoiled had traumatized him.

And faced with this fact...

“Geez, fine, whatever... Medhi, let’s do this.”

“Yes. We’d better cure him—and quickly.”

...Wise pulled out her tome, and Medhi gripped her staff, each casting a spell in turn.

“...*Spara la magia per mirare... Morte!*”

“Oh... I died...”

"...Spara la magia per mirare... Rianimato!"

"Mm? I'm back already?"

No sooner had the coffin formed around him than he was back to life. Wise and Medhi sidled up to him, whispering in his ears.

"Hero Masato, thou have been reborn. A new life lies before thee."

"Huh? Reborn? I have?!"

"Yes. The life you led before is no more. You stand here a new man, free of any burdens that may have corrupted your soul."

"Wow! I do feel brand new! Being reborn is amazing!"

Masato is now New Masato!

"Yeah, right! I'm the same person I was a second ago; don't be stupid."

"Yeah... We know."

"But you at least recovered enough to play along with the joke for a minute. It's good to have you back."

"I hate the part of me that can't get enough of routines like this, but... Well, it's helped me face reality anyway. Thanks, I guess."

He felt better in spite of himself. Wise and Medhi grinned happily, and he glared at them...but his gratitude was genuine.

"Um, do you mind?"

Mone had stepped in, arms akimbo, glaring at Wise and Medhi.

"Um, what? Are you mad or something?"

"I'm not *mad*, exactly...but this totally isn't cool. I wanted to be the one to cheer Masato up! But you did it before I could, and that's so unfair!"

"So you're just not happy..."

"Are you showing me how close you are all out of spite? Because it sure seems like it!"

"Back up. We weren't trying to do anything like that! We simply gave him the push he needed."

“Yes. We just had an idea that might work and gave it a shot.”

He wasn’t exactly pleased that they’d killed him on a hunch, but...

...Masato realized he was surrounded by girls who were fighting over *him*.

“Let me be very clear! *I’m* Masato’s girlfriend. Remember that!”

“M-Mone?! Don’t be ridiculous! Have you lost your mind?” exclaimed Wise.

“You can do better than *him*,” said Medhi.

“Whoa, wait, what does *that* mean?”

Clearly, not all of them were fighting for the same reasons.

But before the conflict could get any worse, there was a knock at the door.

“Geez, more customers? But...it’s already nighttime! We’re closed!”

“Come on in!”

“M-Mom?!”

Mamako was already letting the new customers in.

“Sup?!”

“Rika! Where are your manners? You’re pushing thirty, and you can’t even greet people properly?”

“I’m still in my twenties! Maybe in my late twenties, but still plenty young!”

A young (according to her) woman and a middle-aged one. Both had similar faces. They were each carrying art supplies; pens, tablets, brushes, paints, et cetera—probably artists.

Since they were here, Masato could hardly ask them to leave. He made sure the girls were getting refreshments ready and led the two women to their seats. He and Mamako sat down opposite each other.

“Hi. Welcome. How can we help—?”

“Ma-kun, introductions first. So nice to meet you. I’m—”

“Oh, don’t worry. I’m part of the management staff, so I know all about the two of you.”

“Er... You’re an admin?”

“I’m a character designer, so I don’t really get directly involved in running operations. My name is Rika Suzuya. And this is my mom.”

“Kanako Suzuya. Lovely to meet you both.”

Kanako bowed low. “Rika!” she growled, poking her daughter with one elbow. “R-right...” Rika lowered her head, too.

“Just think of us as you would test players. That’s how our accounts are set up. If we can get right to business...”

“Oh? Go right ahead.”

“We’ve come to the Mom Shop because our relationship has problems. Not anything related to spoiling, mind you. More so—”

“Introduce me to the prince! I wanna marry him!”

Not only was that not related to spoiling, it didn’t even have anything to do with their relationship.

“A prince...every girl’s dream. So much better than a random pretty face. They’re the ultimate man—heart, mind, and body. Styled to perfection, refined manners, and a sweet voice calling my name... Oh, it really gets me. Just imagining my perfect prince pushes me over the edge! Ahhhh!”

One minute Rika was doing an impressive (for her age) dreamy teen routine, then the next her eyes opened wide and she threw her whole self into a desperate plea.

“So anyway, introduce me to him! The prince came here, right?! You know him?!”

“Um...would you please leave?”

“Absolutely not! I’m not leaving here until I’m hitched to a prince! You may not be up to it, Masato, but I’m sure Mamako can make it happen! Bring that prince here! C’mon! C’mon, c’mon, c’mon!”

“I’m getting pretty annoyed, so please leave. I meant it. Scram.”

“S-sorry! My daughter is a handful, and I must apologize for her. I’ll explain

things from the top. Rika! You be quiet.”

“Hnggg...!”

Kanako grabbed her daughter by the nape of her neck, explaining.

“My daughter has been into princes since she was a kid and spends all her free time drawing pictures of them...and she got good enough at drawing that she became a professional illustrator and got hired to work on this game.”

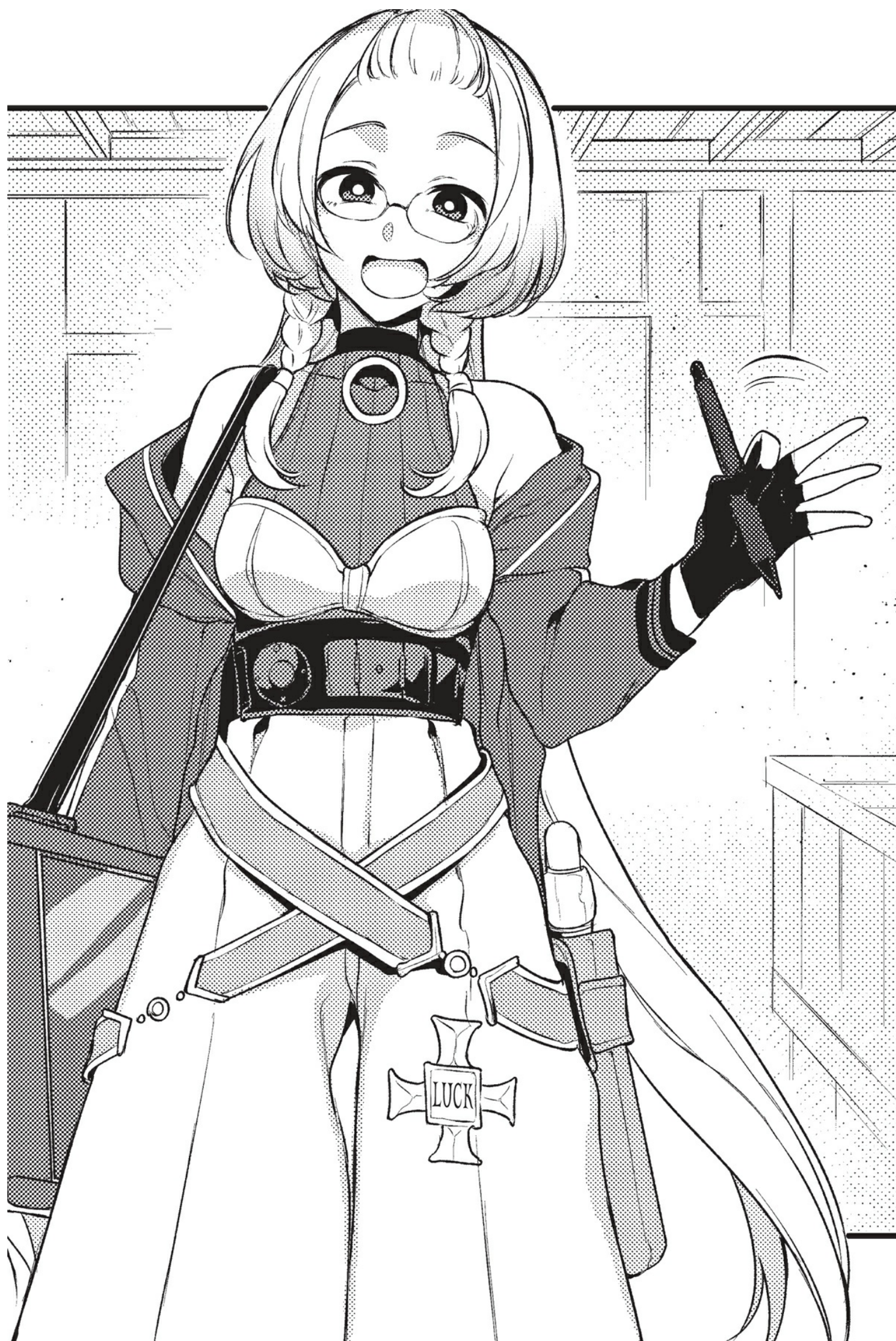
“Are you the one who designed the prince of Catharn, Rika?”

“I can’t really brag about it too loud, but YES! I took all my ideals, and the prince just exploded out of me! Soooo goood!”

“And the reason she can’t brag about it as loud as she just did is because she basically blackmailed her boss into letting her design him.”

“I just promised not to sue him for power harassment in a very pleasant voice! Totally legal!”

“And then, once the prince was actually implemented in the game, he insisted she had to meet him face-to-face...and ran to the person who approves those things, forcing them to put her application through.



Since you can only play this game in parent/child pairs, I got dragged into this...”

“And now you’re here, huh? You certainly know how to get your way.”

“My love for the prince knows no bounds! A little professional misconduct is totally acceptable in the name of love! I mean, there are people doing way worse things...”

Rika glanced behind the counter, where Porta was busy stealing snacks. “... Huh?” Porta clearly had no idea why a glance had been directed her way—super-adorable.

“Also! We’re definitely a family with a problem that needs fixing! We’re on the verge of collapse! So it’s totally right that we are allowed in.”

“So what *is* this problem?”

“I’ve been dreaming about marrying a prince since I was a little girl. It’s so important to me...but Mom says otherwise.”

“I tell her ‘You need to get over this!’ and ‘Get yourself a normal human boyfriend if you ever want to get married.’ I’ve lost track of how many times! But does she ever listen?!”

“See! She’s impossible! What kind of parent fails to support their child’s dreams? I have no choice but to cut her loose for good! So, Masato?”

Rika pulled out the fake Mom Shop flyer, grinning.

“To save our bond and to keep Mamako as your mother, you’re gonna hook me up with that prince!”

“Honestly, you seem like a real pain in the ass, so I’d love to just say no...”

“Oh, I just had an idea! I could use my power as a character designer to cover all your equipment in adorable illustrations of Mamako! You’d be the most embarrassing hero ever!”

“You’re downright evil!! F-fine! We’ll do it! We’ll do whatever you want, just don’t ever make that design change!”

This threat was far too fearsome to ignore. Masato was forced to accept her

request.

The next day, the party left the Mom Shop in the hands of Mone and the Suzuyas and headed to the castle.

“The first non-spoiling-related actual job we get, and it’s this crap... I’m tired already.”

“I cringed hard when she started screaming ‘Introduce me to the prince!’ She’s waaaaay too into that idea.”

“She’s less a woman in love than a starving beast.”

“I think she just loves princes that much! But he *is* a prince, so this won’t be easy!”

“Right... No idea how this will turn out, but it certainly can’t hurt to ask.”

They reached the castle gates.

The guards on duty fixed them with stern glares.

“The first barrier. They don’t let any old adventurer through. Mom’s apparently world-famous now, but that won’t be enough to—”

“Oh! Is that Mamako Oosuki?!”

“Definitely her! The victor of the World Matriarchal Arts Tournament, the mother to beat all mothers, Mamako Oosuki! It’s an honor to meet you! Please, go on through!”

“Why, thank you!”

“They didn’t even ask for ID!”

That was way too easy. “Can you sign my armor?” “Me too!” “Is that good enough?” They were actually there a while, but eventually, the party found themselves inside.

Walls covered in statues and paintings, polished floors, ceilings soaring high above. The splendor of the entrance hall silenced them all for a moment.

“W-well, we managed to get inside... Now for the next problem: He’s a prince.

It's gonna be tough to get an audience with the guy."

"Shouldn't it be super-easy, though? Masato, just ask."

"You already tripped the flag."

"Masato, it's up to you!"

"No, no, it'll never happen. I don't care what you say... This won't be something where the prince would happen to walk by, see Mom, and come dashing over to—"

"Oh, if it isn't Mamako! And Masato and everyone else! It's been ages!"

"Oh, Your Highness!"

"Seriously?! He just walked by?! What the...? Do I have some sort of secret skill, or—?"

Had Masato developed a previously undetected Flag Craftsman skill? Seemed unlikely.

In came Prince Prince of Catharn, elegant garb fluttering, his running form flawless.

"Welcome, everyone! I'm so pleased to see you all!"

"Thanks. Uh, Your Highness. Pardon the intrusion, but..."

"Could we ask you a personal question?"

"Go right ahead! What is it?"

"Are you, like, married?"

"No, I'm not."

"Are you seeing anyone? Any fiancées, perhaps?"

"Nothing like that, no."

He appeared entirely unperturbed by this line of questioning...

"Um, is there anyone you like?"

"Am I in love, you mean? ...Well...um...no."

Porta's question alone got to him. He denied it in a very small voice, staring

awkwardly at the floor.

What did that mean?

That definitely seems like he has someone in mind...

But did he? This really wasn't Masato's field of expertise, so he decided to withhold judgment.

"Point is, that's what we're here to talk about. We've got someone who really wants to be matched with you, so we were hoping you'd agree to meet her."

"I—I see... You're bringing me a proposal, then? Can you tell me about the woman in question?"

"She's one of this game's character designers... Sheesh, that feels really weird to say to a character in the game. Anyway, she really wants to meet you. She wants to so badly that she forced her way into the game."

"A character designer... Hmm..."

That seemed to give him food for thought. The prince frowned, thinking.

It was best to keep things light here. Better not to mention that she'd actually designed the prince himself. That would just complicate matters.

"I think it would be worth at least meeting her once, but what do you say?"

"Well...since you've all been such a great help to me, and she seems very keen on the idea...I suppose meeting her wouldn't... Oh no, wait a moment."

"Is there a problem?" asked Mamako.

"I don't know what my mother would say. My mother is the queen, and without her approval, I could hardly agree."

"Then we'll just have to ask Her Majesty! ...Masato, you're up."

"Go raise another flag."

"Masato! You can do it!"

"Heh... Watch and weep. Ahem. Uh, there's no way the queen would just happen to walk by and see us here! I mean, she's the queen!"

...She didn't walk by.

They stood there for a very long time.

“Huh.”

“Your phrasing was all wrong,” said Wise.

Medhi agreed. “You shouldn’t have said ‘us.’ You should have said ‘Mamako.’”

“No, no, that can’t be it! That would just mean this was Mom’s power! And that can’t be true. The queen wouldn’t just spy on my mom, and—”

“Oh, Mamako! And your children. Good day.”

“Her Majesty is here!” exclaimed Porta.

“Oh my! Am I intruding?”

She’d really come. Queen Queen of Catharn, in a gorgeous dress, making a beeline for Mamako.

Masato curled up on the floor, sobbing.

As a result of their success the other day, Masato’s party was received as friends. No stiff ceremonies, no audience chambers—they were invited into the castle gardens.

Elegant tea and treats were served, and they got down to business.

“So she’d like to meet the prince with an eye toward marriage?” A cloud passed over the queen’s face.

“I-I’m sorry, I know this is very sudden.”

“Yes...it certainly has taken me by surprise. I suppose the immediate problem is that she’s neither royalty nor of noble birth, but a commoner.”

“Is that entirely out of the question?”

“Perhaps this is difficult for you to understand...but living with these ancient traditions is the fate of the royal family. No matter how silly they may seem, they cannot be easily altered. So...”

“Mother, if I may.”

Seeing his mother about to put her foot down, the prince rose to his feet.

He moved around behind her, giving her a piggyback hug. A rather tight one.

“Oh my! Your Highness! In front of everyone? You’re such a mama’s boy.”

“Hee-hee. You two are so close!”

“See, Masato? You can’t let them win!”

“This is your chance to show the true power of the Hero Family!”

“Go for it, Masato!”

“Right, in that case... Like hell I will!”

“Aw, what a shame. But that’s okay! You let me spoil you so much working at the Mom Shop yesterday, my spoil tank is completely full!”

“Yeah, yeah, don’t bring it up. Focus!”

The prince was trying to make a point. But the queen had taken control again.

“No use trying to curry favor with a little spoiling, dear. The rules are the rules, and this cannot be.”

“Alas, I am shot down. But, Mother, at least consider it. I was just thinking it was time I settled down. I would love to at least meet her. With your permission, of course.”

“I am delighted to hear your desire to get married, but...”

“Then, please.”

The prince tightened his embrace.

“Still...” The queen remained unmoved.

If they couldn’t get past her guard, the conversation would end here.

But then...

“Huh? Masato, the tea is nasty sweet all of a sudden!”

“Hey, Wise, I’m truly amazed you’re just drinking tea at a moment like this, but seriously, read the room. Who cares if the tea is suddenly... Oh, weird, it really is horribly sweet.”

He'd taken a sip himself, and Wise was right. It was unpleasantly cloying. But a moment before, there'd been no sugar in it at all.

Something that wasn't sweet, suddenly spoiled... Wait, no!

When the accumulated effect of spoiling her child hit her upper limits, Mamako had a terrifying skill that would spoil everything around her—A Mother's Spoiling.

The effects were astonishing. They could alter the outcome of a bet, change the difficulty of a dungeon, and spoil just about anything.

And Mamako had just said her tank was full.

"Worth a shot... Uh, Mom, can we get a word from you on this matter?"

"Yes. Your Majesty—consider this a request from me."

"I can't refuse any request from you, Mamako. Very well."

"That was *way* too easy!"

The queen's guard had been instantly spoiled, and the conversation moved to the next stage.

"That skill is *broken*."

"Huh? Did something break?"

Having a mother who could unconsciously alter anything around her was certainly handy, but for her son, it was also somewhat upsetting.

Anyway, the queen was on board. She nodded and proclaimed, "Then, how about this? Tomorrow, we as a nation will hold a grand-scale courtship ball."

"A courtship ball?"

"Regardless of rank, anyone can participate. Including the prince and the woman you wish for him to meet."

"And if they form a connection, you'll allow them to marry? Regardless of her status?"

"I can only hope the prince finds himself a woman of noble birth instead, but even if that is not the case, I promise I will allow it. That is the only concession I

can offer. Will that be good enough for you, Mamako?”

“Certainly. I think it’s a lovely idea. Let’s do that!”

“Then that settles it. A courtship ball it will be!”

Everyone was on board. Masato wasn’t sure about this...

...but it was at least a step toward solving this threat of their client’s request.

One word from the queen, and her ministers gathered, discussing what must be done to hold this ball. With nothing to offer, Masato’s party focused on devouring the really fancy treats the royal family provided.

But others were watching. Hiding in the castle gardens were Amante and Sorella.

“...Tch. Looks like they settled things. We didn’t even get a chance to interrupt.”

“If only the queen had turned her dooown. What nooow?”

“We have no choice but to attack the ball and ruin— No, that won’t work. The only way Mamako Oosuki loses is if the courtship ball happens, but she still fails the request.”

“Theeen...we’ll have to join the baaaall. Let’s goooo.”

Exchanging malicious grins, they began plotting their secret scheme.

Back at the shop, the party gave Rika a progress update.

“I knew I was right to ask you! Thanks! I couldn’t be more pumped!”

“The rest is totally up to you.”

“Huh? How so? You all have to back me up here. I mean...”

Uh-oh.

“A common girl desperate to meet a prince...all dressed up, heart beating fast, headed to the ball...but then she’s surrounded by duplicitous

noblewomen! Her path blocked, she is tormented, unable to even get near the prince! Alas! A love like a fresh bouquet, doomed to wither away unsated!”

Rika was getting increasingly theatrical.

Then she turned and slapped Masato on the shoulder.

“That’s how all the prince routes go in Otome games! So I’ll need you running interference.”

“Huh? Interference? Er, no, I really think those difficulties are up to you to—”

“You get through these scenes by getting someone to help you. That’s the key to clearing them! You know it.”

“That might work in games, but...”

“We’re in a game.”

“Oh, right.”

“Then you’re in, yes?”

“Uh...okay.”

She’d battered him down.

The Mom Shop closed for the day, and the party was moving through the evening streets.

They were headed for a boutique that sold ball gowns.

“There it is! The gown that’ll claim the prince’s heart! It’s miiiiine!” She charged in.

“Wait, Rika! ...Argh, I’m so sorry. I’ll go stop her!”

Rika had burst into the shop, all fired up, and Kanako was forced to give chase.

The rest of the group could only watch, amazed.

“So...I’ve been thinking...”

“She’ll be just fine! Nothing wrong with being motivated. Hee-hee.”

“And once she’s in front of the prince, you just know she’ll go all quiet and meek.”

“Ugh, I hate that! That sounds more like something *you’d* do, Medhi.”

“Heh-heh-heh. Wise, let’s go talk in that shadowy corner.” There was a low rumbling sound.

“Eek! Medhi! Your dark power is overflowing! Bottle it up!” cried Porta.

Some things never changed.

“Come on, Masato! We’re going in!”

“Yikes?!”

Mone had grabbed Masato’s arm, rubbing her cheek against it. “Stop that!” “You know you like it!” It was soft and ticklish, and all the nerves in his arm were screaming.

“Let’s go pick a gown!”

“No, no, we don’t need any! We’re just backup!”

“But to be backup, we need to be on the ballroom floor! We’ve got to dress for the occasion. If we went in our usual clothes, we’d be kicked out!”

“You...think so?”

“Totally! So gowns for everyone! I’m going to pick out an adorable gown that will make your heart skip a beat, Masato. You’ll be so into me that you’ll forget all about your little red and white friends.”

Mone glared at Wise and Medhi.

Neither seemed terribly pleased to be reduced to the primary colors they wore.

“Masato’s heart, huh?”

“You want him so into you that he’ll forget us?”

“Hmm? Wait, wait... Are you two getting competitive here?”

“Mone! Snap out of it!”

“This is Masato you’re talking about! You can do so much better!”

Both girls had gone white as a sheet, seemingly super-concerned about Mone's well-being. "Can I just punch you both yet?" With friends like these...

But just for a moment, the merest fraction of a second...

...both pairs of eyes glanced his way.

Just a peek.

"...Sigh, fine. He's hardly my type, but I'm not about to let a challenge go unanswered."

"A formal ball held on behalf of the realm. Of course we should look our best! I hardly want to be considered uncultured. This is a challenge any woman would be forced to accept."

"Yeah, my point exactly! So we're picking gowns, too. And so is Porta."

"Yes! I would love to wear a cute dress!"

"Then it's settled. Time for a courtship showdown!"

Mone, Wise, Medhi, and Porta—all were clearly taking this seriously.

So the first to step forward was...

"Who will thrill Ma-kun the most? It's a dress-picking contest!"

""""""Yeah!""""""

"No, wait! Why is Mom the most into this?!"

But Mamako was already inside the boutique.

Everywhere he looked, there were women's clothes. All pretty pricey. Formal suits and gowns. But this was a shop specializing in high-end women's apparel, so what else would they sell?

And all the customers were women, too. News of the courtship ball had already spread throughout the land. Women of all ages were here: groups of friends, ladies with their maids—the place was packed.

There was only one male here: Masato.

“Yeah, I figured... People going to a courtship ball aren’t exactly likely to have men with them, are they?”

The looks he was getting were distinctly uncomfortable. Every glance said “Why is *he* here?” He was ready to bolt.

Mamako and the girls had fanned out across the shop, searching for their ideal gown. “Ma-kun! Mommy’s right over here!” She kept beckoning to him, but he was pointedly ignoring her.

Masato settled down on a bench by one wall, waiting quietly.

“*Sigh*... Can I just leave? Go home?”

“That is certainly a pathetic statement. The true test of any man is to put up with women’s shopping without complaint.”

“I know that, but it’s asking a lot someti— Er...”

He looked toward the voice.

Shiraaase was sitting there, in full nun garb.

“Augh! Where’d you scuttle out from?!”

“I’m hardly an insect! I was here long before you arrived.”

“Y-you were? So you’d *already* spawned?”

“If you insist on treating me like an insect, then very well. I am but a bug...”

Shiraaase reached out her hand, put her fingertips on Masato’s thigh, and began walking them around on it. “Eeeeeek?!” He shuddered. This was as bad a sensation as anything not R-rated could be!

“Heh-heh-heh. How does it feel, having a friendly bug mother toying with you?”

“I’m so sorry! I should never have mouthed off to you! Please, show mercy!”

“Then, I will. This seems like a good opportunity for an update. First, about this...”

Shiraaase produced the fake Mom Shop flyer.

“Oh, that. Amante and Sorella, right?”

“Our investigation suggests they designed, printed, and distributed it entirely by themselves.”

“Demonstrating some entirely unnecessary skills and dedication.”

“We believe they are still lurking somewhere within Catharn...but for various reasons, operations have temporarily suspended the search for them.”

“What reasons?”

“Look over there.”

He followed her gaze and saw a woman perusing the gowns intently.

She wore a black dress and looked exactly like Mamako.

“Um... Is that Hahako?”

“Yes. Hahako is here. She suddenly appeared in the Catharn capital, and we’ve been forced to ramp up our monitoring of her.”

“What brings her here? What’s she after?”

“Well...just listen closely.”

Hahako was muttering under her breath:

“I’ve got to pick an outfit that will make people say ‘Can I please be your child?’ Which of these will do that...?”

Hoo boy.

“...A ball is certainly a place to meet others, but not usually for *that*.”

“But it does appear she has learned that children are not something you can acquire by force. The events of the World Matriarchal Arts Tournament appear to have been a net positive.”

“So she’ll learn from her failures again this time?”

“We hope so. But at the same time, we can’t risk just leaving her to it...”

“You’re in charge of her, right? And that leaves the two Four Heavenly Kings to us.”

“I’m so pleased you understand. Oh, speak of the devil. Look over there...”

“You’re kidding!” Masato hastily scanned the shop. “...They’re not here, are they?”

“No. Showing up here to pick out gowns would be far too stupid.”

“Yeah. They’re really dumb, but not quite that dumb. Ha-ha-ha.”

Then...

“Masato! Over here! Let us know what you think!” Mone was calling for him. Her voice was mercilessly loud.

Every eye in the shop piercing his skin, Masato jumped to his feet.

“Argh! Now everyone’s looking at me! Damn her... Sorry, Shiraaase! I gotta deal with this.”

“Your value as a man is being tested! I wish you luck in battle.”

“I wish this was just a normal battle, but noooo! Later!”

Mone’s voice had come from the back—where the changing rooms were.

When Masato came running up...

“Oh, you’re here! Where’d you go? Come on!”

“Right! That battle commences!”

“Which of us will make Masato’s heart beat the fastest?!”

“I’m in! I’ll try my best, too!”

Lined up in their respective changing rooms were Mone, Wise, Medhi, and Porta—only their faces poking out.

“What? Wise, Medhi... You guys acted like you didn’t care, but you seem real fired up now!”

“Yeah, well...once you get the dress on, it’s hard not to.”

“I have always enjoyed dressing up. Any woman would.”

“Who’s going to start?”

“Nope, nope! I’m the first at bat! ...Ta-daa!”

Mone flung open the curtains and leaped out, wearing...

...a cute, frilly, sweet dress, perfect for jumping into the arms of loved ones.

Any man would open his arms, sweep her up in a hug, and spoil her rotten!

“Well, Masato? What do you think?”

“Uh...it’s okay, I guess.”

“Never say ‘I guess’! It makes it sound like you don’t mean it!”

“Mone definitely didn’t set his heart all aflutter, so she’s already out. I’m up next!”

Now it was Wise’s turn. The high-school Sage sailed out with great confidence, wearing...

...a passionate red dress, just a bit too mature for her.

Like something a femme fatale would wear—the kind of woman whose advances no man could resist.

“C’mon, Masato! Go ahead, say something! Go on! Go on!”

“Hmm... It’s very red.”

“J-just the color?! That’s all you’ve got?!”

“It seems Wise has been shot down, too. Time for the real deal.”

Medhi emerged with a relaxed smile.

A pure-white dress of a simple yet detailed design—very ladylike.

An unblemished flower, blooming where all could see!

“Come, Masato. I await your top-tier compliments.”

“...*Daifuku*.”

“Huh? Wh-what does that even mean?!”

“White on the outside but filled with something dark. First thing that came to mind.”

“Some thoughts you should just keep to yourself! Do you even remember

you're commenting on our dresses?!"

"Um... Can I come out now?"

While Medhi was reeling in horror, Porta emerged wearing...

...a little princess dress with lots of frills. Even the shoulder bag was cute.

Anyone who saw it would say the same thing: *Must protect!*

"Wow! Perfect, Porta! That's super-cute! You're like a real princess!"

"Th-thanks!"

Masato had unwittingly picked Porta up and spun her around him. "My princess is so cute!" "Eeeek!" Like a doting father playing with his daughter.

Meanwhile, the losers...

"Argh! He's really into that one!"

"But it doesn't count as making his heart race. He just thinks she's cute."

"Th-that means this battle is a tie! Everyone agree?"

"Y-yeah, sounds good to me."

"Right. This never happened."

The girls almost wrapped it up, when...

"Oh, Ma-kun! Are you there? Do you have a moment?"

...Mamako's voice emerged from a nearby changing room.

Wise's, Medhi's, and Mone's brows all furrowed in unison, their gazes fixed intently on Masato.

"...Um, Masato."

"Just to be sure, here..."

"...Your mother won't get your heart racing, right?"

"Don't be ridiculous! There's no way! Just you watch!"

Masato put Porta down and moved over to the dressing room.

He took a deep breath. Stay frosty.

“Hey, Mom, it’s me. What is it?”

“Oh, Ma-kun! There you are. I just wanted you to see this!”

The curtains opened, and Mamako emerged.

She was clad in a sexy evening gown, skintight, as elegant as it was gorgeous.

Her beauty so flawless even Aphrodite herself would kick off her shoes and run for it!

But to Masato, she was just his mom. No heart racing here.

“Um... Well, as your son, I’d prefer something a little less revealing, but...good enough. Not weird, at least.”

“Oh? Then I guess I’ll keep it... But it’s a little hard to get on. I just can’t reach the back! ...Oops!”

Mamako had twisted to reach the back, and the moment she did, her chest shifted. “Hell nooooo!” Masato instantly grabbed the dress, keeping things from popping free. Safe!

“Th-that was close! My heart’s racing so fast it almost leaped out of my chest!”

““““Ugh, I knew it.””””

“Not like thaaaaat! That’s not what I meaaaant! ...Look, Mom, you’re done, right? Change back!”

He shoved his mother back into the dressing room and breathed a sigh of relief.

Porta had gone back in the dressing room, too. No problems there.

Just three teenage girls all glaring at him.

He shouldn’t have to do this, but...

“Uh, Mone.”

“Mm? What?”

“That frilly dress really is perfect for you. I don’t really know how to give compliments like this, so...that’s the best I can manage.”

“Oh... N-no, that’s... Thank you.”

“Wise, your dress isn’t bad, either. Red’s definitely your color. And the cut of it’s right for you—down to the way it’s trying to be a little older than you are.”

“Er... Oh, uh...thanks...”

“Medhi, too. Your body language is always graceful, so I think it’s the right choice to wear something simple like that rather than try too hard with something flashier. It brings out the best in you.”

“Th-that’s really nice of you... Thank you.”

He’d been hoping not to have to say all that, but there you are.

Mone, Wise, and Medhi were all left staring at him, mouths half open.

“Um. What’s with the staring?”

“W-well...”

“Just... I dunno, we really didn’t expect that. My brain just, like, short-circuited...”

“I’m at a loss for what to do next.”

“Come on; it’s not that hard! If you’ve picked a dress, change back into your normal clothes, buy the dress, and let’s go home! Keep it moving; one, two!”

He clapped his hands, and the three of them went back into their changing rooms. “Ugh, what the heck?” First they were demanding, then mean, then all suddenly flabbergasted. A real piece of work, these girls.

“Whatever. At least we’re done shopping now... Shiraaase left the Heavenly Kings to us, but they won’t be *here*... We can just relax and go home!”

He stretched, feeling free.

And then his eyes met theirs.

Two faces poking out of the changing rooms opposite, staring at Masato.

A fierce-looking girl with a ponytail and a woman with languid, sinister eyes.

“...Um.”

They gave Masato a long stare, then looked around, then gave Masato

another long stare.

“Wha—?! Amante?! Sorella?! What are you...?!”

Instantly, Amante shot out of the changing room. “Mmph?!” She grabbed a fistful of Masato’s shirt and dragged him in with her.

It was very cramped. The two Heavenly Kings were right in front of Masato, crammed in like sardines...and both in their underwear.

His heart was really racing now, for more than one reason. Definitely the fastest rate he’d hit that day.

“Hey?! Th-there are so many problems here, but first—!”

“We’re in our underwear, but never mind that! You already saw me wearing a bath towel at the Mom Guild! I got over it then.”

“I never cared in the first plaaace. It’s only youuuu. Who caaaares.”

“Some things should just be unacceptable! All I’m asking is that you treat me like a man—or at least an enemy!”

“If you obey our instructions, we won’t attack. We might have it out for Mamako Oosuki, Wise the Sage, and Medhi the Cleric, but we don’t really consider you a threat.”

“Masatoooo...you just aren’t dangerouuus. But don’t woorry. We just have a few questioooons.”

“...Sniff.”

The Hero deemed neither man nor enemy allowed a tear to roll down his cheek.

But at least as long as he did what he was told, his life wasn’t in immediate danger.

But if he cried out, and the others came running and rescued him from a pair of underwear-clad girls...he could say good-bye to his last shred of dignity. He had to avoid that at any cost.

It was safer to do as he was told. Masato nodded, acquiescing, and Amante released him.

“...What is it you want to ask?”

“Ha! Only one thing it could be.”

“You seeee... It’s these gooowns.”

Amante and Sorella both grinned.

They held up a pair of dresses, one tiger-striped, and the other featuring a bone motif.

“Well? Does this seem right for me?”

“Can I get an honest male perspectiiiive?”

“How should I know?! Wear whatever you like!” Masato snapped, his voice louder than intended. “Oops...,” he said, realizing it. “You idiot!” “Eeeek!” Amante and Sorella both grabbed their clothes and ran. They were instantly out of sight.

Masato was out of danger...or not.

“Ma-kun, what’s wrong? I heard yelling!”

Mamako swept in to check on him, the rest of the girls behind her.

Masato was in the changing room of a store exclusively for women, clutching the gowns Amante and Sorella had foisted off on him. How could he explain this one?

“D-do these look good?” he said, holding the gowns up against him.

“Um, I guess? I don’t really know how to compliment a guy in a dress, honestly.”

“Nothing says Masato like tiger print and bones.”

“They really bring out the best in you.”

Mone, Wise, and Medhi each spoke in a flat monotone.

“Er, um, um... I—I like them!” Porta said, a hint of desperation in her voice.

“Hmm...,” pondered Mamako. “But they’re not the right size. I’ll go find one big enough for you, just you wait!”



“No, I was just kidding! Don’t go look! Don’t take this seriously, please!”

All good mothers do their best to accept everything about their beloved sons, but sometimes this just makes things worse.

The next day was the day of the ball.

The girls were all dressed to the nines...and Masato was just as he always was.

“Wait... Why isn’t Masato wearing a gown?! Hee-hee.”

“Look, I said that was just a joke! The stupid Heavenly Kings—!”

“Masato, you’re just embarrassing yourself. Stop making excuses.”

“I hate to say it, but blaming the enemy? It’s unbecoming for a Hero.”

“I’m telling the truth! I swear!”

“I promise to believe you if you spoil me a lot!”

“Come on and—no, keep it to a minimum! Everyone’s staring...”

Reeling from the relentless teasing and attempts to grab his arm, Masato somehow made it through the castle gates.

This was where the ball was to take place—a sublime time spent in an elegant location, perfect for meeting the partner of your dreams... With that in mind, the queen had opened all floors to the public.

The castle was filled with people, both men and women, engaged in conversation. Each doing their best to find the perfect partner.

The guest of honor, Rika, was wearing a dress with a dramatic bare back. She was raring to go. Kanako was with her, wearing a crisp suit: formal yet feminine.

“Here it goes... I can finally court the prince!”

“That’s right. You’ll greet him, apologize for all of this, and then we’ll go right home.”

“Mom?! Don’t say that, even as a joke!”

“Of course. I wasn’t joking. I meant every word. Sorry.”

“Argh! You just be quiet, Mom! This is *my* ball!”

Kanako was as unenthused as Rika was wildly enthusiastic, and they headed in, bickering away.

Masato’s party followed awkwardly.

“...Kanako’s dead set against this, huh?”

“Yeah. As a mother, she must have plenty of concerns.”

“I guess I have trouble seeing her perspective...but it definitely is starting to feel like Kanako’s going to be the biggest obstacle in solving this problem.”

“Oh? Mommy thinks Kanako will be the key to making this all work out!”

“Let’s hope you’re right... Mm?”

Rika had suddenly stopped dead in her tracks, carefully scanning the crowd around her.

“I don’t see the prince anywhere... He must be somewhere else.”

“You simply weren’t destined to meet! Time to leave—”

“We are *not* leaving! Shut up, Mom!”

“Should we summon him for you? Mamako can hoist that flag anytime.”

“She can?! Then... No, we’d better not. Him appearing now would be unwise.”

“Is there a problem?”

“If the prince appears, he’ll be swarmed by other girls. We won’t have a chance to talk in peace. So first...I need to destroy all these other girls!”

“Uh... This is a *ball*.”

“Exactly! And what is a ball but a battlefield where you lay your life on the line?! A battle to the death over who snags the prince and who has him snatched away! That’s why...”

But even as Rika got fired up...

“My, my, what a barbarian. Tee-hee.”

“This is why I cannot abide commoners. Tee-hee.”

“Thinks she’s going to snag the prince—has she not seen her own face in a mirror? Tee-hee.”

Three ladies appeared, each in a jewel-encrusted nouveau riche dress—one gold, one silver, and one bronze.

Rika steeled herself.

“Heh... Here they are... Brace yourselves for combat!”

“Okay, but...how exactly should we do that?”

“Just do as I tell you! First... Wise! Walk past those three!”

“Huh? I’m up? Fine, whatever. Here goes nothing...”

Wise walked right past the three ladies. Just walking normally.

But as she did, she suddenly tripped. “Wha—? Augh?!” She fell flat on her face, exposing the fancy red panties she’d acquired just for the occasion.

The lady in the gold dress sneered down at her. “Oh dear... Tripping over nothing? What is wrong with you? Tee-hee.”

It had definitely looked like Wise had tripped herself up for no reason...

But the truth did not escape Porta’s eagle eyes.

“Masato! I saw it! The gold lady quickly stuck her foot out and tripped Wise!”

“Wh-what the heck?”

“As I thought... Mean ladies always have a powerful low kick!”

“Yeah, in fighting games!”

“If you knew that, you shouldn’t have sent me into the trap! Argh, now I’m pissed! ...Hey, you!”

Wise bounded to her feet, facing down the gold lady.

They glared at each other, standing so close their noses almost touched.

“You think you’re funny, huh? Well, you don’t know nothing.”

“Hmm? What are you talking about?”

“We’ve got someone far meaner than you’ll ever be. Small-fry tactics like

yours don't stand a chance against us!"

Wise grinned and stomped on her opponent's foot.

"Ow! Wh-what are you doing?!"

"Oh... What do you mean? I'm not doing anything!"

"Tch... If that's the way you want to play...!"

The lady in the gold dress glanced at the lady in the silver dress. The silver lady quietly stepped forward and tried to kick Wise in the shin.

But as fast as her kick was, Medhi's foot intercepted it.

"How...?!"

"I have no idea who Wise could be referring to...but she's right about you ladies being small fries. You don't even know how to kick properly."

"Tch... You little—!"

"And your expressions just aren't cutting it. If you *really* want to look threatening, do *this*."

An ominous aura sprang up around her, followed by a low rumbling.

"Eeeeeek?! She's terrifying! H-help!"

The bronze lady looked around for assistance, but...

"No! I won't let you leave!"

"Wha—? Hey, let go! Who is this child?!"

...Porta had latched on to her and held her still.

"We've got these ladies handled!"

"Masato, Mamako, the rest is up to you! I know you'll have Rika's back!"

"Make sure she can meet the prince! I'm cheering for you!"

"Oh...! Thank you, everyone! I'll never forget your sacrifice! ...Come on, Masato! Step over the corpses of your fallen comrades! Onward!"

"Nobody's died, but sure, let's go."

Rika had tears streaming down her face, and Masato was totally not prepared

to handle that.

But the battle known as courtship was proceeding to the next stage.

They moved from the entrance farther into the castle. This area was filled with open rooms—ornately decorated reception rooms, parlors where tea was being served, and so on.

The crowds showed no signs of thinning. Some enjoying themselves, some clearly stressing it; couples forming all around. Clearly, good times were being had.

“Is this how courtship usually goes? Still, this is more—”

“Where is my prince?! Where is he?! Grrrrr!!”

“Rikaaa! Calm yourself! Argh, I swear my daughter used to be human! You are far too ravenous!”

“Kanako, her leash is all yours. I couldn’t possibly.”

It was like taking a starving animal for a walk.

Also...

“Where is the prince? Do you know, Masato?” *Rub, rub.*

“I’m sure he’s around somewhere. And will you stop trying to make me dote on you?”

“Mommy’s own prince is right here! Hee-hee!” *Squeeze!*

“Yo, Mom! Don’t just grab my arm like that!”

A flower in each hand—or perhaps just a burden—Masato definitely had his hands full. His physical and mental powers were being rapidly drained.

Then...

“...*Gasp?! Everyone, on your guard! Prepare for battle!*”

“Seriously, this isn’t a fight.”

Masato’s protest was ignored. Rika braced herself.

A pack of elegant men were coming down the hall.

“Wow! Those men are practically sparkling! ...Masato, is that what the sons of aristocracy look like?”

“Probably. They’re all handsome, too. Not that it’s a competition, but it still ticks me off!”

“Don’t worry, Ma-kun. You’ll always be the handsomest in Mommy’s eyes. Hee-hee.”

“Yeah, yeah, thanks. Nobody cares what their mom thinks.”

“I think you’re the best, too! Even if you aren’t handsome, I still like you! Hee-hee-hee!”

“The way you subtly slid a diss about my looks in there really ruins the effect, Mone. Either way, we oughta be able to get past this one easily enough. Just pay them no attention.”

“Masato, you fool! This won’t be that easy!”

“Er, it won’t?”

Rika looked even more tense than she had against the mean girls.

But then she started to fidget.

“I mean, if I get surrounded by all these gorgeous men...what’ll I ever do?”

“Uh...”

“I...I’ve got my heart set on the prince! But...but...if they turn the full power of their charm on me...I might get lured into the grasp of any old hunk! Ah! I am a sinful woman!”

“Excuse me, but if I could just be blunt for a moment... Cut the crap, lady!”

By this point, the group of hunks were practically toe-to-toe with them.

“No! No! No matter how lovely I am, my heart is taken! ...Oh nooo!”

Their hearts snared, the entire group of men...

...walked straight past Rika and surrounded Mamako.

“What a beautiful young lady! This is love at first sight!”

“Oh my! Young? I’m already a mother!”

“You are?! A mother, with that complexion? That sounds like the rumors of... *Gasp!* You wouldn’t be Mamako Oosuki, would you?”

“Yes, I am. And this is my son, Ma-kun!”

“Don’t care about him. I knew it was you! It’s an honor to meet you.”

“Nobody cares about your son, but if you wouldn’t mind talking to us more?”

Admiration rained down upon Mamako.

As for Masato... Well, he was used to this.

But Rika was left frozen midwriggle. “*Sniff...* Right, Masato! Let’s leave this to Mamako and move onward!”

“Uh, sure. I’m, um...sorry?”

“Don’t apologize! That just makes it feel more pathetic! So we’re good!”

Rika was keeping her spirits up through sheer obstinance.

Past that obstacle, they reached the upper floors. Like the lower ones, this was another area with lots of open rooms.

And yet...

“Huh? There’s no one here.”

“Yeah... Is this area off-limits?”

“I don’t think so. There weren’t any signs... So I assume it’s just that no one’s come here yet. Still, weird...”

When Masato and Mone fell silent, the floor grew eerily quiet. Not a single sound anywhere.

An unsettling kind of silence.

“In any RPG, this kind of quiet means something bad’s about to happen... Rika, what do you think?”

“This happens all the time in Otome games. Crowds coincidentally disperse to

allow the heroine and the prince to meet.”

“...Is that what this is?”

“Yes. I’m sure of it! We were looking for the prince and found ourselves in a deserted area. We think we’re somewhere we’re not supposed to be and look around anxiously...and oh my! Through the window—the prince of her dreams, standing on the balcony!”

Well, that was certainly some dramatic narration. Masato looked around.

At the end of the hall was a window, and outside, on the balcony, was the prince. He was staring up at the sky.

“Wahhhhhhhhhhh?! He-he’s really theeeeere?! Oh my god, he really iiiiiis!! Aughhhhh! I’m so shocked that I’ve got snot coming out!” *Splurt!*

“Whoa... Rika broke,” said Mone.

“She was always broken.”

“Rika! Goodness gracious, what ails you?” Kanako pulled out some tissues. “Here, blow.” Her daughter was repaired! A real handful, this girl.

Anyway, fully recovered...

“Th-then... Time for the climax! I can meet my prince!”

“Seems like it,” said Masato. “Just go down the hall, out on the balcony... He’s all yours.”

This was as far as her backup could take her. The rest was up to Rika herself.

But Rika didn’t move. She was stressing so hard she was sweating, her legs locked in place.

“...Rika?”

“R-right, I know... I have to meet the prince, and then...then what?”

“Uh... That’s up to you...”

“Just do this! Watch!” Mone moved away from Masato, then broke into a run, throwing her arms— “Nope.”

“Huh?!”

Masato dodged with perfect timing, and her attempted embrace whiffed hard.

“Aw, the prince’s dodge skill isn’t that high! You’re supposed to catch me!”

“Oh, sorry. That was a demonstration, huh? I just dodged out of habit.”

“*Sniff*. Wahhh! You’re so mean, Masato! You won’t ever spoil me! You *have* to spoil me! If my spoil reserves dry up, my powers...”

“Whoa! Hold it in!”

The power of her cravings activated, drawing everything around Mone toward her.

Not just the people but the flowers, décor, all of it... “Stop! Stoppp!” Masato hastily threw his arms around Mone, letting her snuggle as much as she wanted. It was the only solution.

“There, there. There, there! Nuzzle me all you like! Nuzzle away!”

“*Rub, rub!* Hee-hee-hee! Spoil quotient obtained!”

“It’s over? Whew... Uh, so basically like that, Rika.”

“No, no, no, no! That’ll never work! I can’t just throw myself at the prince!”

He’d handled Mone, but Rika was still at square one, unable to take the next step. When...

“Then I guess we’re done here. Time to go home!”

Kanako’s tone was extra-strict.

“Huh? No, wait! Mom, what are you saying?”

“I made myself perfectly clear. You’ve seen the characters you designed acting like regular humans. Isn’t that joy enough? Aren’t you satisfied? It’s time to go back to the real world and find a proper human partner—”

“I want to marry my ideal prince, the one I drew myself! Anything else is pointless!”

“You keep saying that, but you can’t even go give the man a simple hello. You’re just standing here fidgeting.”

“Urk... That... Well, I... Uh...”

“No more hemming and hawing. It’s time you gave up. I’m going to rest for a while over there, so when you’re ready to leave, come get me.”

Looking thoroughly annoyed, Kanako retreated into a nearby room.

But a moment later...

“Oh, perfect! There are cakes and tea... Hmm? ...Aiiieeeee?!”

“Wha—? ...Kanako?!”

“Hey, Mom?! What’s wrong?!”

They ran in the direction of Kanako’s scream.

Inside, they found a pile of bodies—women in ball gowns or maid uniforms. At least ten of them.

“A-are they...are they dead...?!” shouted Kanako.

“Mom, calm down! It’ll be fine! ...Right, Masato?”

“They’re all breathing, so they aren’t dead. Everyone’s still alive.”

“Looks like they’re just unconscious... I bet this is the effect of a spell.”

“I see... So this is the RPG route after all...”

“That’s right! The prince’s groupies were in the way, so we cleared ’em out with a spell! But I don’t have to explain that to you!”

“Then why did youuuu, Amanteeee? You really have to stop doing thaaaat.”

Only one enemy helpfully explained everything.

Amante, in a tiger-striped dress, and Sorella, in a bone-patterned gown. They entered the room together.

“I’m surprised to see you dressed like that, but I figured this was you.”

“Well? Do they look good? Feel free to give us your thoughts.”

“Are we making your heart raaaace? Are weee?”

“Sure, definitely... In a bad way.”

The situation was dire.

They were up against two of the Four Heavenly Kings. Amante had no weapons with her, but her physical prowess was off the charts. Sorella could use magic and summon undead monsters.

Meanwhile, on Masato's side...

".....Mone, can you fight?"

"Erk... Maybe not... I've got a special power, but...no actual combat abilities."

"Okay... Then..."

He glanced at Rika, who shook her head. Kanako was still in a state of shock.

The situation was clearly desperate.

"Don't even think about it. Just do as we say! ...Here!" Amante suddenly tossed a vase at him.

Masato reflexively tried to catch it, but it was shockingly heavy. "Yikes!" Unable to support it, his knees buckled, and he ended up pinned to the floor with a vase on his knees.

"This...is Sorella's debuff skill? Damn!"

"That's riiiiight! You're so weak nooow. The vases around here seem expensiive. Make sure you don't drop iiiit."

Amante forced Rika and Kanako to hold a vase as well, pinning them to the spot.

And Mone also.

"You behave, too. Here!"

"Eep! This certainly does look expensive! ...I really don't want to drop it, so I'll just put it back where it belongs!"

Mone moved over to the wall and put the vase down on a table. Whew!

Huh?

"Uh, Mone? You can move?"

"Sure! Just like always, ah-ha-ha."

"Whaaaat? H-h-howwww?! Is my debuff skill not woooking?"

“That doesn’t— Wait, wasn’t she some sort of dark god created as a hidden boss? If she’s actually a monster, does that make her immune to debuffs?”

“I’m not a monster! I’m a frail little girl!”

“You’ve got a special skill but no combat abilities, but you’re immune to debuffs... Everything about you makes no sense.”

“Heyyy! Masato, don’t be mean! You big dummy!”

She started beating her fists against him, which was annoying, but...at least Mone was still mobile.

The two Heavenly Kings were quickly losing their confidence.

“Argh... If Sorella’s skill doesn’t work, this girl could be trouble!”

“It would really suck if Mamako showed uuup. We’ve got to finish our triiick.”

“Hey, wait! What are you planning?”

“Sheesh, you think just because you ask, we’re gonna tell you about our plans to brainwash the prince so he and the person Mamako Oosuki wants him to meet don’t get along, forcing the Mom Shop to fail a job?”

“You’re a lifesaver, honestly.”

Amante even flashed a dark jewel at him.

Using this item allowed her to control the mind of any NPC.

Crap! What now? I’ve gotta do something about that!

He knew one way.

“Right! ...Mone! Listen closely to what I’m about to say!”

“Huh?! O-okay! What is it?”

“From now until forever, you’re not allowed to make me spoil you!”

“Er... Whaaaaat?! Why?! Since when?! You can’t just... If I can’t be spoiled, I’ll... I need spoiling, or else I...”

Masato’s shocking command immediately shattered Mone’s poise.

And it unleashed the power of her cravings, causing a strong gravitational pull. Everything was yanked toward her, crumbling before her, inhaled into her body.

Including the vases holding them down and the dark jewel in Amante's hand.

"Urgh! This power... Augh! No!"

"It's been turned to dust and swalloooowed! We only had the oooooone!"

"All right! Now... Uh... Oh crap. I didn't think of a next step!" The gravitational pull was only getting stronger. Masato was closest—and inches away from being swallowed himself! "Oh crap, oh crap, oh crap!" And he didn't have the strength to escape its pull!

Oh no... I'm gonna die...

These were Hero Masato's final moments.

What flashed before his eyes? The faces of his comrades, his mother's smile...

Then he felt a vibration at his feet.

"The ground's swaying... Oh no! A Mother's Fangs? *Now?* Should I be glad or sad?"

A moment later, a crack ran down the floor, and a rock spike shot up between Masato and Mone.

The fang from below forced the crack even wider, the spike growing ever larger, reaching higher and higher...

...and in the hollow at the tip was Mamako, sitting on a handkerchief she'd spread out.

"Ma-kun! It's your mommy!"

"You can ride this thing now?!"

"It's just like an elevator! Such a time-saver. Hee-hee!"

"If your means of transport demolishes the building, who's gonna pay for it?!
...But this time, thanks."

He tried to force the grimace off his face.

First, time to take care of these enemies... “Ack, Mamako Oosuki!” “Retreeeeeat!” ...Or not. They were already gone. The moment Mamako Oosuki appeared, Amante and Sorella had flung themselves out the window, riding away on Sorella’s gigantic magic tome.

“Damn! ...Oh, whatever. We can deal with those idiots later! First...”

They had to do something about the other crisis.

Mone’s gravitational pull was still very active, even causing A Mother’s Fangs to crumble.

The no-spoil rule had been a means of dealing with the Heavenly Kings. Masato hadn’t actually meant it... Well, maybe part of him had.

“I guess I’d better do something about Mone before...”

“Mone, don’t worry. I’ll spoil you all you want!” *There, there.*

“Oh, really? Yaaay! ...*Rub, rub. Rub, rub...* Oh, Mamako, you certainly are a step or two above the others. The blessing of being spoiled instantly soothes the craving in my heart...”

“My role has already been usurped!”

Mone was satisfied with Mamako’s spoiling. Her powers subsided.

Rika and Kanako were both safe. The unconscious ladies were waking up.

The room itself was a disaster area, but everything else seemed settled.

“Argh... I knew this would happen. Mom solves everything again. *Sigh...* But all’s well that ends well. Anyway—”

“I heard a horrific noise! What happened?!”

“Gah, what now?!”

The prince had burst into the room, looking beside himself.

“G-good lord... Masato! What happened here?”

“Well...”

Okay, Masato could handle this one. Explaining things to the prince was certainly a boring job but an important— No, wait, he’d just had an idea.

“Uh, Your Highness. I’m sure *she* can explain the details.”

Masato pointed at Rika.

“Er... Wha—? Huh? Um... M-me?!”

“That’s right! Go ahead! Go on!”

“No, um, whaaat?! Masato, back up! Why me?!”

“Because this gives you a chance to talk to the prince! I’m not going to stand here and explain everything like that one idiot does.”

“You just did! And I appreciate the attempt, but... No, I’m not ready!”

“If we wait for you to be ready, this will never happen. Go on! Go, go, go!”

“B-but...”

Rika was still hesitant to approach the prince of her dreams.

But then Kanako stepped up beside her.

“Goodness, what are you waiting for? Nerves maketh the woman.”

She straightened out Rika’s clothes and hair and stroked her cheek.

Then she gave her a push.

“You got everyone mixed up in your selfishness. Now’s the time to show us your good side. Go on.”

“Mom...”

Her mother’s no-nonsense encouragement seemed to help. Rika gave a small nod, then a larger one. Then she stepped forward.

Rika stood before the prince.

“N-nice to meet you! My name is Rika Suzuya! I’m a character designer, and I’m participating in this courtship ball as a test player!”

“Rika Suzuya... If you’re a character designer, then you must be the person Mamako wanted to introduce me to.”

“Yes! That’s me! Um... S-so uh...as to what happened here...”

Each time their eyes met, Rika turned red and started sweating, but she stuck

to her guns and kept the words flowing.

Watching her, Kanako's expression was... Well, there was a lot going on there.

"I never meant to help her do this... Why did I do that? I'm certain she's better off never meeting him, so why?"

"It's because you're a mother, I'm sure of it," Mamako said. "All mothers wish for their children's happiness."

Kanako looked surprised, thought about it for a moment—then a look of resignation passed over her face. A slow smile followed—she did look genuinely pleased. It seemed like a fundamental shift in her perspective.

Kanako looked at her daughter again, this time protectively.

Watching over them both, Masato's party smiled, too.

"It was Kanako who finally made her take that step."

"I hate to admit that Mom was right, but she was. Perhaps this is a special skill? A Mother's Push? Seems like the sort of skill moms would have. But I bet my mom will never learn that one..."

"I-I'm sure I could! Mommy will definitely send you off someday—!"

"Nope, never. You're always the first to run off ahead! Experience has taught me that much."

"Th-that's not true! Even Mommy...sometimes..."

"Yeah, yeah, I'll believe it when I see it."

Mamako started practicing giving Masato's back a push, but he ignored her.

"So let's leave the rest to these young 'uns..."

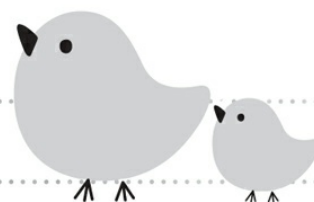
"Huh? But Masato, you and I are much younger than the prince and Rika," Mone pointed out.

"...Right."

Better correct the cliché. Leaving the rest to the old 'uns, the party filed silently out of the room.

Mom Consultation Forum 4

Mama's BBS



Question

Submitted by: MYSTERIOUS WORKING MOTHER



I'm so busy with work I can't make time for my child.
What can I do? If you have good ideas, please infoorm
me of them.

Answer

MAMAKO



You're watching over us and dealing with the Libere
Rebellion and Hahako all at once... You must be so busy,
Ms. Shiraaase!

SHIRAAASE

Easily identified, I see. Lately, I've been getting only
busier, and I'm sure my daughter must be really
missing me. (´;ω;`) Waaahhh!



MAMAKO



Oh my goodness! No need to cry! There must be
something... I know! Why not bring your child here
with you?

SHIRAAASE

Then we could be together...and I could see if she can
properly greet all of you. That sounds lovely. I'll have to
look into it.



Chapter 6 MP-Free. Ridiculously Effective. Should a Skill Like That Even Exist? Concerning.

The courtship ball was still in full swing.

Countless encounters had occurred, and more and more people were finding themselves with amenable partners. They were finding their ways to secluded areas for more private conversations. Go right ahead! Make yourselves happy.

Sadly, there were also those who came up empty and ready to leave—but they, too, were given one last chance.

“This calls for drinks!” “Come, drink with me!” Many groups stopped in local bars on their way out. That in itself appeared to be a good time—although, the sun was still high.

Masato’s party wasn’t actually here to court anyone, and with the job they’d been hired for accomplished, they’d regrouped and were relaxing in the castle garden. Thoroughly enjoying the royal cake and tea.

“Mm, sooo good... Anyway, Masato. Gotta ask.”

“Huh? What?”

“The heck is that?”

Wise pointed across the garden.

Hahako was sitting in a seat meant for courtship, wearing a beautiful gown and holding a sign that said RECRUITING CHILDREN. Shiraaase was there, too.

“No one’s approaching her...”

“They sure aren’t.”

“I wonder why...?”

“Truly a mystery.”

There definitely seemed to be a few men interested, but none had actually spoken to her. Her reasons for being here were clearly different, so perhaps this

outcome was inevitable.

The two women were definitely beautiful, but both were taking this whole thing so seriously it made them rather unapproachable.

Unable to think of any way to help, Masato elected to pretend he hadn't seen them.

"Let her do what she likes. We can leave that problem to Shiraaase."

"Fair enough," agreed Wise. "Let's do that."

"I have a question, too," Medhi said.

"Mm? What?"

"What's going on over there?"

In the direction she pointed...

"Sniff... Sniff... Sniffle..."

"Please don't cry! Eat some of this yummy cake and cheer up!"

"Sniff... Munch, munch... Sniffle..."

...Rika was collapsed on the table, refusing to budge. Porta was trying to cheer her up, but it was proving ineffective. The table was stained with tears.

"Rika's condition? Well... Mone, explain."

"She was able to talk to the prince, but all she did was introduce herself, explain what all the commotion was about...and that was it. She didn't exactly do anything in the 'courtship' department."

"Oh dear."

"What a shame."

"...I mean... I got so nervous... My mind went blank... *Sniffle...*"

"Honestly, you're such a mess! Come on, get it together! You're older than all these children! It's time you acted like it. Come on!"

Kanako sounded thoroughly disgusted, but she was gently rubbing her daughter's back like any mother would.

And the other mother present...

“Ma-kun! Now’s your chance! Go on!” *Pat, pat, pat, pat.*

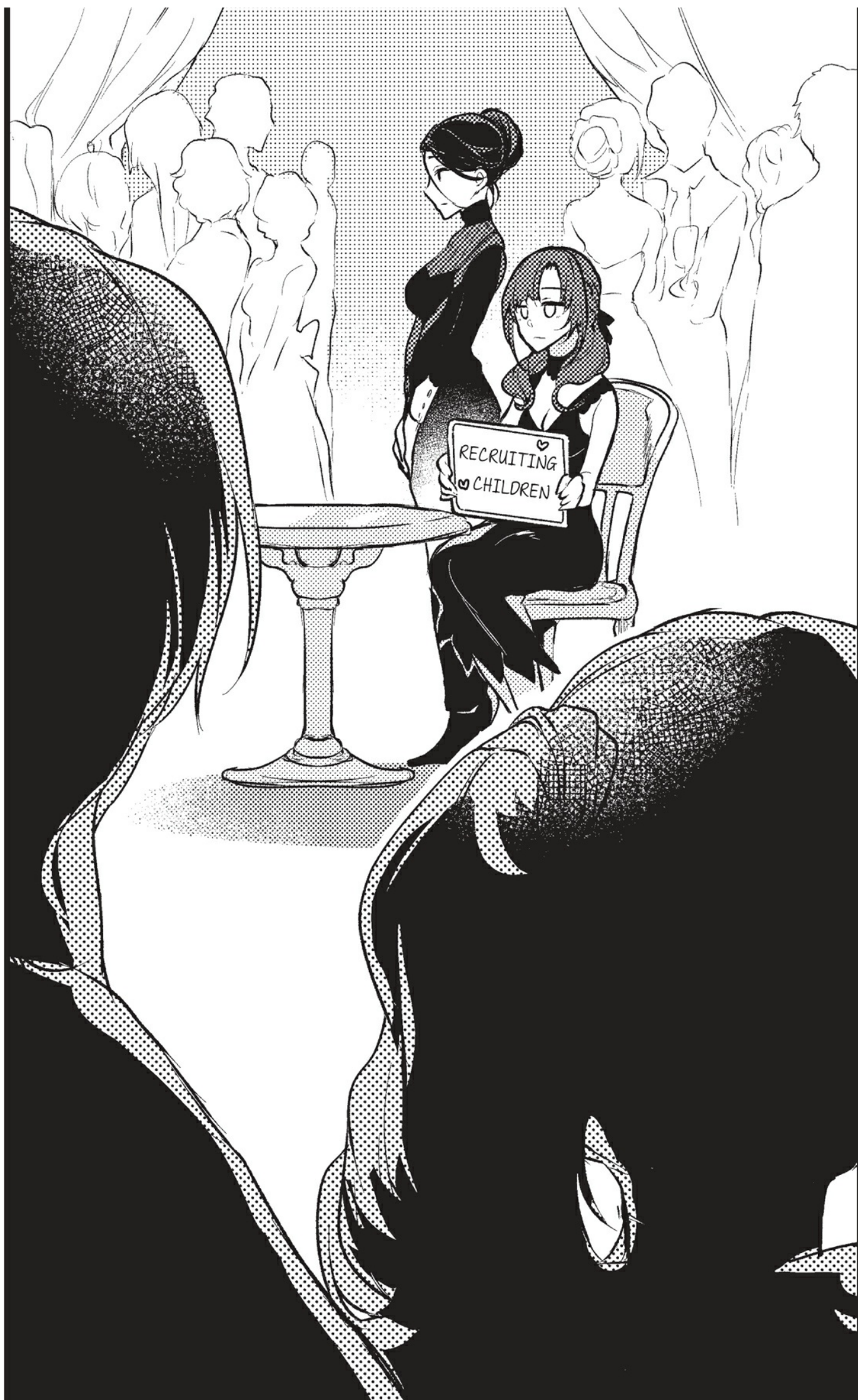
“Stop pushing me! This isn’t even the right time for that! Even if I did step in here, there’s nothing I can do!”

Mamako was busy trying to acquire a motherly skill and practicing hard. Ignore her.

Hurling the last bits of cake into their mouths, the girls sighed.

“So what’s our final score?”

“Basically, the courtship’s a failure.”



“...Y-you don’t need to spell it out like that! You’re awful, Medhi... *Sniff...*”

“Then does that mean the Mom Shop has failed?”

“I don’t think so. I mean, we got her the meeting with the prince!”

“And it’s up to them to make the match work. We did our part successfully, and Rika ruined her chance all on her own.”

“...I didn’t! It’s not my fault... It’s...it’s Masato’s fault! If you hadn’t made me talk to the prince in that wreck of a room...”

“D-don’t try to pin this on me! This isn’t my fault! I just...”

“Don’t worry, Ma-kun. Settle down. Rika and the prince’s courtship *was* a success!” Mamako said with inexplicable confidence. Still patting his back.

“A success...how?”

“Mommy’s hunch!” *Sparkle!* ☆

“Oh boy...”

That doesn’t prove anything! But before Masato could protest...

A fanfare rang out. The queen appeared on a terrace above the garden.

“Good evening. I hope everyone’s enjoying the ball. I am delighted to see so many of you have found lovely partners... Oh?”

The queen had spotted Hahako’s whole ghost town situation—“Um... W-well, moving right along!”—and promptly pretended she hadn’t.

“At any rate, this ball is a great success. And my son, Prince Prince of Catharn, would like to take this moment to say a word to you all.”

All eyes turned to the terrace.

Well, there was one person not looking.

“Come on, Rika! The prince is making a speech!”

“...He’s just gonna say he’s engaged to someone other than me... *Sniff...*”

“Geez, you’re a pain. Uh, wait...”

Masato had just seen the prince walk off the terrace and out into the garden,

growing closer by the moment.

His gaze was fixed directly on Rika, who was lying facedown on the table.

Seriously? Mom's hunch was right?

Masato and Mamako immediately figured it out and left their seats, making room for him.

The prince sat down across from Rika and softly spoke to her.

"Rika, may I ask you something?"

"?!?!?!?!"

Rika realized who was sitting opposite her but did not get up. She'd clearly frozen stiff and couldn't get up even if she'd wanted to.

Even seeing her like this, the prince smiled gently.

"There's someone I've always been curious about. And today, by some miracle, we were brought together. I was able to meet them at last."

"I—I see... I don't know if that happened before or after me, but...you met them, huh?"

"This person was like a god to me. They were always on my mind. Not a day went by without me thinking about them."

"I—I see... That sounds far beyond concepts like love or hate."

"As you say. I exist only for them. My sole desire is to devote myself to this person. So first, I felt I should communicate those feelings—to you, my beloved creator."

"...Huh?"

Rika finally looked up.

The prince pulled his shirt open, revealing the mark emblazoned on his chest—a symbol made by combining an R and an S.

"I once thought this mark stood for super-rare, but upon further investigation, I discovered it was a signature, hidden here by the one who drew me. That would be you, Rika Suzuya."

“Uh... I was so happy I got to design the prince that I was all ‘This prince is mine!’ and may have gotten carried away... I figured no one would notice since it was hidden behind the other layers...”

“Also, about my name...”

“That wasn’t me! The chief—my boss just decided that without asking! I protested as hard as I could, but it was no use!”

“I see. Then I have no more doubts remaining... Rika, you are my creator, the one I’ve yearned for and the one I wish to devote myself to. It hardly seems appropriate to confess my desires to someone like yourself, yet...”

He held out his hand.

“...Rika Suzuya, will you marry me?”

Straight to marriage.

“Er,” Rika said. “M...mmmm... Mo-Mom! Moooooom!”

“Goodness, what now?”

Rika was a complete wreck and clinging to her mother.

“C-can I? Can I really do this?! Well?!”

“Why are you asking me? This is your decision!”

“B-but... Mom, you’re against it, right? You’ve been opposed to this from the start!”

“Yes, I certainly have been. When I was young, I was an illustrator. I drew characters that were just my type and dreamed about spending time with them. But it was never anything more than a dream. And part of me resented the way you can make your dream come true the way I never could. I believe I was what the kids call *jelly*.”

“Wait, Mom?! You’re just jealous?! That’s it?!”

“But when I saw my own child so absorbed in it, so dedicated, so adamant about pursuing it... Well, as a mother...”

Kanako turned her gaze toward Mamako. Mamako smiled back.

“Your dream is my dream,” Kanako said. “Your happiness is my happiness. So get it together!”

She slapped Rika on the back.

Rika nodded, wiped her tears, and sat up straight.

“I—I—I can’t believe this, but okay!”

“I could say the same.”

The prince and Rika took each other’s hands.

The fanfare musicians played a celebratory tune, and a round of applause rose up from all around them.

Rika burst into tears. “Oh, look at you!” “Oh my!” “Medic! Medic!” Kanako and Mamako and the girls were immediately given the duty of fixing Rika’s face, which was fascinating in its own right. Either way, a happy ending.

Masato clapped for them, too. And then the queen came over.

“So this *is* how it ends... The moment Mamako brought the subject up, I had a feeling it was something special...and it certainly was.”

“I’m sorry for all the trouble, Mother... But since the two of us feel the same way, will you approve of the match?”

“Sure. Provisionally.”

“Provisionally? Then you still don’t fully approve?”

“For the two of you to get married, there is a trial you must overcome.”

The queen raised a hand. The fanfare cut off, and the guards silenced the crowd.

Certain all eyes were on her, the queen proclaimed:

“Prince, Rika, I have a message for you both. Listen well.”

“Yes, Mother.”

“Wh-whatever could it be, um, M-Mother?”

“According to the traditions of the realm, you will now engage in a trial to test the bond between you two. If you can clear this trial, good. If you cannot,

custom dictates that the marriage be declared null and void. I trust you understand the importance of this.”

This statement sent them tumbling off the pinnacle of their happiness. Both the prince’s and Rika’s minds had clearly gone blank.

“...One problem after another, huh?”

Masato’s party stared at one another, but there was nothing else to be said.

The prince and Rika followed the queen toward the castle depths.

Masato’s party was allowed to join them as their bodyguards.

“Um, Your Majesty? If they need guards, does that mean this trial is dangerous?”

“I wish I could say otherwise, but one can never be too sure. The dungeon where this trial takes place is only accessible to the royal family and those designated as guards, so we can neither maintain the place nor investigate it.”

“So we’re along for the ride just in case?” said Wise. “Let’s hope no monsters made their homes there, then.”

“Feels like we should be ready for just about anything...,” added Medhi.

“Oooh...,” moaned Porta. “I hope there aren’t any ghosts...”

“Ghosts? Sorella does have the power to command the undead so...that would make this the prime location for her to fight us. Which would be...not great.”

The ancient stone passage didn’t actually have any bones lying in it but otherwise was definitely giving off a catacomb-y vibe. The only light was from lamps held by the queen and Porta. When the conversation died down, their minds started playing tricks on them—it sure sounded like there were more footsteps than there were people here.

The prince and Rika said not a word, holding each other’s hands tight.

Then something suddenly grabbed Masato’s hand.

“Aughhhh?! ...Oh—Mone! What the heck?!”

“No need to be so alarmed! I just got jealous seeing the prince and Rika like that, so I figured we could hold hands, too!”

“Then say something first, geez.”

“Oh my! Ma-kun, are you scared? Don’t worry; you can hold hands with Mommy. See? It’s safe.”

“Stop that! Please, let go!”

“Mamako certainly is close to her son... I wonder if I can be that close to my new son, the prince!”

“Don’t, Kanako! You’re taking the wrong lessons from my mom!”

Masato’s protests echoed down the darkened staircase. Eventually, the stairs ended, and they found themselves in an open area.

Facing a pair of red doors emblazoned with the crest of the Catharn Kingdom.

“Red... Very red.”

“But Wise is definitely *more* red.”

“No point comparing me to doors, is there? ...So, Your Majesty? This the place?”

“Indeed, it is. From here on is the Red Dungeon of Fate.”

The queen raised a hand, and the doors swung open silently.

The passage inside was red. Walls, ceiling, and floor.

“The results here cannot be overturned by anything. Brace yourselves.”

“Yes, Mother!”

“We’ll do the best we can!”

“Very well. Kanako, you will remain here with me. I’m sure we have much to talk about.”

“Yes, I agree.”

“Bodyguards, please ensure no harm comes to the two of them.”

“Got it. So...”

“Let’s go!”

Mone pulled Masato’s hands, heading into the passage. Behind them were Mamako, the prince and Rika, and Porta.

Wise and Medhi brought up the rear.

“...About Mone. What exactly is so much fun about making Masato dote on her?”

“Obviously, I have no idea. But...”

“But?”

“I’m a bit surprised to hear it bothers you, Wise.”

“No, it doesn’t. I didn’t, like, mean anything by it. Not like *that* anyway. And it definitely feels like the Heavenly Kings are gonna attack here, so stay focused.”

Chattering away, torchlight reflecting off the red walls onto their faces.

They began exploring the Red Dungeon of Fate.

As they watched Wise and Medhi head in, the queen raised her hand again, and the doors swung closed.

“Whether the two of them can marry depends on the results of this trial. Is this for the best? For the prince’s happiness, for the future of the royal family, what stance should I take? Even now, my thoughts are scattered, and I fret about each decision.”

“At the very least...as far as our role as mothers goes, it’ll work out in the end. It did for me. Thinking about the future, there are certainly reasons to be concerned, so I can’t say that I wholly approve... But as a mother, I’ve decided I should support my daughter.”

“You’ve made up your mind, then. I’m jealous, Kanako...”

“I’m sure you will, too, Your Majesty. Something special will happen that will make your mind up. After all...*she’s* with them.”

“That’s true. I trust everything will work out for the best... But first, they must overcome this all-too-harsh trial, as I once did. Let us move to the exit and await the results.”

Discussing their troubles, the two mothers turned back up the stairs. As the light faded, the dungeon entrance was shrouded in darkness.

And in due time...

Darkness came scurrying along the wall, swelled into human form, and Amante and Sorella emerged.

“Geez, if you had a transport spell like that, why have we never used it before?”

“I wasn’t hiding iiiit. We just can’t move unseen unless it’s the right kind of daaaarkness. The kind like this plaaace, where you can sense the undead lying in waaaait.”

“Right. In that case, fine. Now, then...”

Standing before the red doors, both gave wicked grins.

“Unaware that we were stealthily following them, these fools wandered into the dungeon...like moths to a flame.”

“Places like thiiiis...were made for my powerrrrs. I can summon all the undead I neeed.”

“It’s not like we’re afraid to face Mamako Oosuki directly! We’re not. Definitely not. But if you can overwhelm her with an unstoppable army, that just seems so much easier!”

“Exaaactly. We’re not afraaaaaid. We just want to enjoy thiiiis. Soooo...come ooon!”

A tatami-sized magic tome appeared over Sorella’s head, slowly opening.

Skeletons with bones gleaming, zombies with dangling bits of rotted flesh, ghosts with no corporeal form—one undead monster after another appeared out of a dimly glowing light.

“You can control a million undead...but that’s at the same time. Which

means...”

“Even if they defeat a miiiillion...I can summon more indefinitelyyyy. I just have to summon a million mooore! It’s functionally infiniiiite!”

“Even Mamako Oosuki can’t beat a million enemies! And with their bodyguards defeated, the royal couple will never clear this trial! Which means...”

“Mamako will fail the fight and her joooob. She’ll be utterly defeeeeeeated!”

“Exactly. Heh-heh. Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

“Mwa-ha! Mwa-ha-haaa!”

Confident of victory, their laughs echoed. Victory was theirs!

The undead army began to march.

“The Red Dungeon of Fate, which only the royal family and their guards can enter! This will be Mamako Oosuki’s grave! Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

“A grave only the royal family and their guards can enter! Mwa-ha-haaa!”

The group of ghosts tried to pass through the doors. But they bounced off.

Then the skeletons and zombies hurled themselves against it. But they bounced off.

A high-ranking undead, a skeleton knight, came running over to Amante and Sorella, shrugging.

“No good. Seems like it’s sealed or something? We can’t get through. Sorry!”

““...Huh?!””

The skeleton knight didn’t seem particularly phased.

“I hear some commotion back at the entrance... Amante and Sorella, maybe? They know this place is only accessible to the royal family and their guards, right? Even they wouldn’t try to break in here! They’re not *that* stupid.”

Masato was wrong. Extremely wrong.

“Rika, can I ask? Do you know anything about the layout of this dungeon or what the trial involves?”

“I was a character designer, so I got nothing on the dungeon layouts. Sorry!”

“I see... Then I guess we’re rolling hint-free!”

The passage was a straight line, extending far into the distance.

There were no signs of any monsters. Everything seemed peaceful enough...

“Exactly the time you have to be on your guard. I have no idea how tough this trial will be, but we’ve gotta be ready. Everyone! Keep your wits—”

“Ah, Masato! Oh no!”

“What is it, Mone? A monster?”

“No, I’m gonna sneeze! ...*Achoo!* Augh, I did.”

Oh dear. He so wanted to slap her. But he restrained himself. “Huh? Are you mad at me?” “Not really.” He didn’t dare.

But then... *Whack!*

“Ow! ...Hey! Masato, you didn’t have to hit me!”

“Huh? What are you talking about? I didn’t hit you!”

“You did! Don’t lie to me! You’re so stupid!”

“I’m not lying! I really didn’t hit you! Only stupid people call people stupid!”

“Whaaaat?!”

“What?”

“Ma-kun, Mone, calm down. Look closely. That’s what hit you, Mone.”

Mamako pointed at the wall.

There was a red hand growing out of it. Holding a red slipper.

“Yeeaugh, that’s so creepy! Why a slipper?!”

“That hand slapped me?! Argh! I’ll make it pay!”

Mone tried to punch the hand, but it and the slipper vanished.

“Was that...a monster?”

“I dunno! But I’m pissed! That really hurt, and it made me fight Masato! Rahhh!”

“Well, isn’t that just peachy? You’re close enough to fight, big whoop. That sorta thing isn’t getting to me, no sirree. I totally do not care.”

Giving Masato and Mone a sideways glance, Wise moved on...

“Yo, ugly.”

Was that Masato’s voice...?

Wise stopped in her tracks, pulsing with rage, summoning her magic tome.

“Masato... You trying to start something?”

“Uh, wait? I didn’t do anything!”

“I heard you! That was definitely your voice! No doubt about it!”

“It wasn’t! I didn’t say anything! That was... Oh, see?”

There was a face sticking out of the wall, laughing. A moment later, it was gone.

“There’s nothing there! Don’t be stupid! If you wanna play it this way... *Spara la—*”

“No magic! At least keep it physical! Actually, don’t do that either!”

“Wise, calm down. You’ve got the wrong idea. It was a face on the wall that called you ugly.”

“Yes, Medhi! See? Like I said!”

“Of course. I clearly witnessed it.”

Medhi nodded, smiling like an angel.

Pbbt.

Time stopped.

The sound had clearly come from Medhi's rear end. An impossible sound. Masato, Mamako, Mone, Rika, the prince, even Wise (face still twisted with rage)—everyone froze, staring at Medhi.

"Er, uh... Medhi... You can't do that."

"Pretending to be innocent is one thing. Your secret dark side is another. But...like, as a girl, you just can't ever do that! And wow, that one's stinky! How does it smell so bad?!"

"W-w-w-wait, no! That's not what that was!"

"Y-yes! Everyone, it wasn't. Clearly!"

"Mamako's right! It wasn't!"

"Y-yes. Poor Medhi! We must pretend we didn't hear it."

"I didn't hear it either! Right, Your Highness?"

"Exactly. I heard nothing! Never fear, Medhi."

With these words of encouragement, everyone averted their eyes. They didn't mean to, but...no one could meet Medhi's gaze right now.

"There's no need to pretend you didn't hear it because it didn't happen! That...that noise didn't come from me!" Medhi grinned.

"Medhi's smiling while raising her staff in the air! She's using violence to silence all witnesses!"

"You plan to eliminate us all?! Medhi, I've always known you had it in you!"

"You think that little of me?! You're the worst!"

Medhi tried to take Wise out first. But before she could...

"Medhi—hee-hee-ha! Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha?!"

"Porta?! No...no, even Porta's laughing at me? I can't... I can never trust anyone again..."

"I-I'm not! That's not... Ah-ha! ...Something's tickling me!"

It was true. Two fingers had stretched out from the wall and were tickling

Porta's sides and belly.

When the party noticed them, they quickly faded.

"You okay, Porta?"

"Y-yes! I'm fine! I'm fine, but listen! Earlier, there was a butt on the wall next to Medhi! The fart came from that butt! Not Medhi! I saw it!"

"Er, really? Porta would never tell a lie... So it must be true."

"Yes! It is! Porta, thank you! That said..."

There was a rumbling sound.

Medhi had unleashed the full strength of her negative emotions. She turned her beautiful smile toward the wall.

WHAM, WHAM, WHAM, WHAM! Four rapid yakuza kicks! The wall crumbled like tofu! "Medhi, we know how you feel, but..." "You can't just damage royal property?" The prince and Rika had both turned white, trying to stop her, but there was no restraining Medhi when she got like this. She had a lot of stress to unleash.

The rest of the party put their heads together.

"I've been thinking... Is *this* the trial?"

"I thought so, too! I'm sure it is!"

"So the goal is to make us fight each other, testing our bonds? That's evil!"

"This dungeon is naughty! It's a very bad dungeon!"

"But if we don't clear it, the prince and Rika can't get married..."

"Yep. Which means we just have to keep going..."

Enduring all these trials was gonna be rough. Bad for their mental health. Which begged the question...

Isn't this trial supposed to be testing the prince and Rika?

It was. So...

"Your Highness, Rika, a moment."

“Wait, Masato! I know what you’re about to say! But there’s no point! We can’t walk in front! I don’t want to risk our relationship getting ruined!”

“But this is *your* trial...”

“*Gasp!* That’s right! This *is* a trial! The prince and I must stand above others, send soldiers into the thick of battle... The will to do so is being tested here!”

“Maybe this is a place where the guards that come with you decide if someone who’d sacrifice civilians for her own interests is a worthy partner for the prince.”

“Urp! Everyone’s glaring at me now...”

Masato wasn’t the only one frowning. Mone and Wise looked equally suspicious. Masato was ready to vote against Rika right now, but...

The prince stepped forward, taking Rika’s hand.

“Rika, Masato is right. This is a trial for the two of us.”

“B-but...!”

“Don’t worry. The bonds that bind us cannot be severed, no matter what happens. And...what happened before will happen no more.”

The prince looked rather tense, but he turned his gaze to the path ahead. The others looked, too.

The walls lining the path ahead had been kicked to pieces as far as the eye could see.

“Heh-heh-heh... Gotcha! You’re the one playing these stupid tricks?”

“Yes—Guh!—I am—Ugh!—The trial!—Oof!—This is my job!—Augh!—I have no choice!—Unff!”

“I don’t care about trials or jobs! You chose that method of bringing shame to a girl! You will pay for that! Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh!”

Radiating dark power, Medhi had grabbed some sort of red clay doll thing. She had it pinned against the remains of the wall and was slamming her knee into it repeatedly. *Thud, thud, thud, thud, thud, thud, thud*. She had the combo up to three digits already.

Everyone blanched at the sight.

“U-um, Ma-kun! I think we should stop Medhi now!” Mamako panicked.

“Yeah, but...I think we should let her vent a bit first. That thing definitely deserves this, after all. Just leave her to it.”

Masato put his hand on Mamako’s shoulder, turning her around. Fully understanding how Medhi felt, the girls, Rika, and the prince all turned, too, pretending they hadn’t seen a thing.

All present wished the red clay doll a merciful death. But...

The red clay doll was inexplicably still alive.

It was prostrate before the party, rubbing its forehead on the ground as it apologized.

“Lady Medhi, companions, I cannot apologize enough. Allow me to formally state my sorrow for having been functionally designed to automatically target whoever was walking in the lead.”

“How polite! But man, you sure can take a beating...”

“I don’t have HP, so that helped.”

“How strange... So what is your name?”

“Trial.”

It raised its head. It had no eyes or mouth, just a blank face.

The Red Dungeon’s trial was named...Trial.

“...Um, Your Highness? Is this really our trial?”

“I was not told the details, so I can’t say for sure...”

“I’m sorry for being such a trial! Even I know my name, design, and functional philosophy are exceedingly slapdash! I wish I had been able to rile up the target pair enough for them to split up, but—”

“Oh, right! You called me ugly! I deserve at least one punch, too!”

“And me! You hit my head with a slipper! Time for some payback!”

“I was only tickled, so I really don’t mind...”

“Very well. Wise and Mone, it’s all yours. Round two, begin!”

“Wait, Lady Medhi! Please, no more beatings! To make up for the trouble, allow me to guide you safely to the exit! Come, this way!”

Trial hastily got up and began beckoning them, bowing low like a guide at a *ryokan*.

Medhi seemed ready to start kicking at any moment, so they put her in the back and followed after it.

“You’re really leading us to the exit? Safely?” asked Masato.

“Of course! I am the trial itself, so as long as I’m guiding you, nothing can happen here! Ha-ha-ha!”

“That seems like a problem in itself...”

“But if we can clear it safely, that’s for the best. Which means... *Rub, rub.*”

“Argh! Mone! Stop with the surprise spoiling!”

Mone had attached herself to Masato’s arm and was rubbing her cheek on him. Regular old spoiling.

Trial glanced back at her.

“Ohhh? It seems we have another bond worth testing. Hmm, hmm.”

“No, we’re good! Nothing like that between us.”

“Is that so? Well, that aside... Just walking is rather dull, so how about some conversation? Since you came all this way, can I ask the prince and princess to tell their story?”

“Princess? Oh my! I’m blushiing!” The woman in her late twenties fidgeted.

“The only thing blush-worthy is your reaction...”

“If you wish to hear the tale of Rika and myself, we must begin with our miraculous encounter.”

The prince took a firm grip of Rika’s hand, happily beginning his story.

But Trial suddenly held up a hand, interrupting.

“A miraculous encounter? So your connection began from something special.”

“That it did.”

“Then you are currently at your peak, and it is all downhill from here.”

“Huh...?”

“That’s how it goes! Especially with a special start. If you marry now, you’ll never get past that first flurry of emotions. The rest of your lives will seem drab by comparison. Your happiness will slowly drain away. Ha-ha-ha.”

“Er, um... Huh?”

The prince and Rika looked at each other, at a loss for words. “Fair enough.” “It’ll never work.” Wise and Medhi both nodded in agreement. Porta was still twelve, so she just tilted her head like she didn’t get it.

But then Mone squeezed Masato’s arm tight.

“Hey! Don’t spout nonsense! The thrill of a first meeting is eternal! ...See? Masato, you agree, right?”

“With what?”

“Masato and Mone—you also had a special first encounter?” asked Trial. “Such a shame. The downward spiral from that pinnacle of happiness is a harsh path to follow. I pity you both.”

“We don’t need your pity! Save that for Wise and Medhi!”

“Hey! Don’t drag me into this!”

“Wise is the one who needs pity, not me.”

“Wise, Lady Medhi, both of you would be a far better match for Masato. You may not have had feelings for each other at first, but after spending so much time together, you will slowly grow fond of each other. It’s really the ideal situation.”

“Hey! Stop that! We will slap you!” shouted Wise.

“That’s precisely what I’m aiming to do. Heh-heh-heh.”

“What?!” Mone yelled, letting go of Masato and swinging around to face the other girls. “You both pretended not to care, but the truth is you’ve been after Masato all along! You tricked me!”

“No, I’m not!” protested Wise. “Don’t get it twisted!”

It seemed a girl fight was about to break out, but Masato couldn’t bring himself to care.

Meanwhile, the prince and Rika were staring nervously at each other, neither saying a word. Like their current happiness was far too great for either of them to look at the road ahead.

Only Masato, Mamako, and Porta had their wits about them.

“This whole small talk thing is actually part of the trial, huh?”

“Attacking them right as they’re giddy with joy... Now I’m worried about the marriage blues sinking in.”

“You’re mean, Trial! You should be nicer!”

“Please forgive me. I’m not doing this out of spite—it’s my job! ...Mamako, what do you really think? You’re the one person here who’s been married.”

“Yeah, Mom. From firsthand experience, what’s it like?”

“Mommy has you, Ma-kun, so I’ve always been happy.” Mamako beamed.

“Oh yeah, right, not helpful.”

“Mama never changes!”

“Reaching Mamako’s realm seems like quite a feat... Certainly not something Rika could ever do...”

“That’s not true!”

The protestation echoed through the corridor.

Rika held her hand high, the prince’s hand clasped in it.

“The prince and I are happy now, and we will be forever! The miracle that brought us together, the happiness we share—we’ll never forget either of those things.”

“Oh, I see. As you were, then.”

“Wait, you’re just gonna give in?! I didn’t even finish my speech!”

“Your point was obvious from the get-go, so I’m satisfied. And some things just can’t be changed by a pretty speech.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Simple. Prince...and Mone. A word over here?”

Trial beckoned the two, leading them a few steps away.

Suddenly, a transparent wall appeared between them and the rest of the party. The two groups were cut off from each other.

Trial’s voice came at them, sounding like it was piped through a speaker: *“Now then, now then, time for a very simple question. What are the people on that side, and what are the prince and Mone?”*

That was a simple question.

Masato got Trial’s point immediately.

Oh, right... That’s definitely something that can’t be changed.

Their interactions had all felt so natural that he kept forgetting the truth.

Masato’s party and Rika were test players. Humans from the real world.

The prince and Mone were NPCs. Characters created to populate the game world.

They were fundamentally different beings.

Once it was certain everyone understood its point, Trial nodded.

“I’m glad you all understand. This is just a fact. The prince and Rika, and Masato and Mone... These pairings were never meant to be. We’re done here.”

The trial was over.

“S-screw that!”

Rika slammed her fist into the glass wall.

“I never lost sight of the truth! But it doesn’t apply to *MMMMMMORPG*

(working title)! In a world like this, flesh and blood versus pure data is a trivial distinction!”

“No, it’s a pretty fundamental one...”

“As long as you don’t get hung up on having kids of your own, there’s no difference between living here or in the real world! I may be a character designer, but I’m also an admin! I know the full specs! I know what I’m talking about!”

“Fair enough. But that doesn’t change that you are very different beings. We’re done here.”

“We’re *not* done! Remove this wall this instant!”

“Rika, Rika! This wall separates the dimensions and cannot be shattered. All you’re doing is hurting your hands. Stop trying.”

“I will not! This doesn’t hurt at... Unh!”

“Rika, that’s enough! I’ll do it! Step back!”

The prince tried tackling the wall from the other side. But the dimensional barrier didn’t budge. He didn’t give up, tackling it again and again.

Trial just watched in silence.

While Mone...

“Sniff... Masato...”

She just stared at Masato, fists clutching handfuls of her skirt.

Masato let out his biggest sigh of the day.

“Let me be very clear. I’ve never been on board with this. The two of us are never going to be like the prince and Rika.”

“Argh! Why can’t you just admit it?”

“I’m admitting everything I have to admit!”

Two people right here, acting desperate.

A girl in front of him, crying.

Masato wasn’t about to just stand here and watch that, okay? Therefore...

“Prince! Rika! Step aside from the dimensional barrier! ...Rahhhhh!”

Masato swung the Holy Sword Firmamento high, striking the dimensional barrier with all his might.

But it just bounced right off, unharmed.

“Damn, that thing’s hard!”

“Masato, switch! I’ll handle this. Mone is whatever, but we need to get the prince and Rika a happy ending!”

“I’m whatever?! You’re mean! ...Gasp! ...Wise, you—you’re going to feign breaking the wall but actually seize this chance to eliminate your rival in love?!”

“I’m gonna blast this wall and your weird theory away together! ...*Spara la magia per mirare... Alto Bomba Sfera! And! Alto Bomba Sfera!*”

Wise chain cast, and two massive bursts of energy slammed into the dimensional wall, causing enormous explosions.

“Ha-ha! How’s that? I bet it—”

“Uh, Wise? Why are you puffing up what you don’t have? You didn’t do anything!”

“Wait, seriously?! ...Also, Masato, come here.”

The dimensional wall was unharmed. “Say you’re sorry.” “I’m sorr—mmph!” “Say you’re sorry!” “I said I’m sorr—mmph!” Masato just had to run his mouth off, and now he was getting that mouth slapped in retaliation.

The destruction efforts continued. Porta bounded forward.

“Let me try! I have...an exploding crystal ball!”

She set the thing down by the wall and everyone backed away. Porta hit the trigger, and an explosion every bit as powerful as Wise’s spell...also failed to scratch the wall.

Medhi’s turn.

“I’m up next. Trial, come; stand before me.”

“You’re going to show no more mercy than you did when you were beating the

stuffing out of me, huh? You're certainly a piece of work, Lady Medhi."

"I'm looking forward to shattering you along with this wall. Here we go!"

Medhi swung her staff as hard as she could, putting the full strength of her dark power behind it. And...!

There was a dull thud. No shattering occurred. "M-my arms..." Medhi reeled backward, still shaking from the impact.

Only Mamako remained.

"Well, I'll just have to give it a try!"

When Mamako stepped up to the dimensional barrier, Trial addressed her.

"I know all about you. But no matter how strong your firepower is, this is one thing you can't break. Because this wall has significance far beyond its mere presence here."

"My, that sounds like a heady concept! ...I wonder what it means?"

"Imagine that Masato fell in love with a drawing of a girl and said he wanted to marry that drawing. Would you agree to it?"

"Well... Hmm. That might be rather difficult."

"That's exactly my point! This dimensional barrier is a commonly held perception, an ethical line that can't ever be crossed. So..."

"But Mone and the prince aren't drawings. We're all here in the same world. We can talk to each other, touch each other, and live our lives together."

"True, but a flesh-and-blood human and an NPC can never be together."

"Is that so? I don't agree. That's why... Ma-kun."

Mamako ran over to Masato, standing behind him.

"Tell me, Ma-kun. What do you really think of Mone?"

"Wh-where'd that come from? That's...not an easy question to answer."

"Then I'll change the question. Ma-kun, do you think Mone being an NPC is a good enough reason to keep the two of you apart?"

"Well, um... I don't think I'd say anything that lame, no. I don't care what the

common perception of it is or whatever. I know the dimensional wall isn't easy to overcome, but..."

"Then it's settled. Mommy's just going to use *that* skill."

"Huh? What skill?"

"Mommy can do it when she tries! Here goes! ...Ma-kun, off you go!"

Mamako patted Masato on the back.

The special mom skill, **A Mother's Push**.

The same skill Kanako had used on Rika, the skill to give a child the courage to step forward.

When Mamako used it, Masato found himself instantly transported to the other side of the wall. Her push had bent the laws of space/time.

"Er... Whoa?! I crossed the dimensional barrier?!"

"Yay! Masato came over here! I'm so happy! *Rub, rub!*"

"Aiiiiiiiiieeeee?! H-howwwwwww?! That's impossibleeeeeee!"

Trial was so astonished it sprayed snot all over, but this was real. It had actually happened.

Mamako wasn't done yet.

"You too, Rika! Go to your beloved prince!" *Pat, pat.*

"Eep... Oh! Your Highness!"

"Rika! I'll never let you go again!"

Rika, too, was sent across the dimensional barrier into her prince's arms. The two lovers held each other close.

"Masatoooo!" "Nope." Mone might be hugging him, but Masato was not hugging her back. He seemed to be attempting to get away. Oh well.

Trial stood there stunned for a moment, then started to laugh. It tapped the dimensional barrier, dissolving it.

"Well, I didn't see that one coming. Never thought you'd actually be able to cross it! You certainly do keep everyone on their toes. How is Mamako even

possible?”

“As her son, I ask myself that every day.”

“I can imagine. Well, since you’ve overcome that, I have no choice but to accept the results. Your Highness, Rika—I offer you this.”

Trial held up a small jeweled box and placed it on the prince’s palm.

Inside was a pair of elegantly engraved rings.

“These are proof you have overcome the trial—the royal engagement rings. Please use them at the wedding ceremony. As they are the royal rings, I have nothing to offer Masato and Mone. Please accept my apologies.”

“Mone and I aren’t together, so no need.”

“Boo! I wanted something!”

“And with that, my role here is done. I wish you all the best.”

A door appeared at the end of the corridor. As it did, Trial began fading away. “Well, at least it got polite at the end...” Very professional.

The exit door opened. It led to an underground room much like the one at the entrance. There were no flashy decorations celebrating their success...but there were the warm smiles of the queen and Kanako.

The prince and Rika ran forward, hand in hand.

“Mother! Kanako! We have returned.”

“We passed the trial! And look! Engagement rings!”

“Calm down, Rika! Take your time. You’re a mess!”

“Oh-ho-ho! I think they both could use a few deep breaths. We were monitoring your trial from here. From the moment you met the red trial.”

That meant... “We’ll have to tell them all about Medhi’s fart—” “Wise, this way.” Wise was dragged back into the dungeon, but... Leave them to it.

What mattered now was the verdict.

“So the prince and Rika have made it through the trial, right?” Masato asked. “Your Majesty, does this mean you’ll finally accept the match wholeheartedly?”

“Well, about that... First, Mamako, a word?”

The queen stepped over to Mamako and took her hand.

“I have been going back and forth this entire time. But you showed me the way. No matter what challenges they may face, you showed me that I must give my son a push and send him off. I know now that this is the way I was meant to be. Seeing you do that made a great impression on me.”

“Oh my... I just did what felt right! Hee-hee.”

“I definitely don’t think that’s anything anyone should be imitating,” Masato grumbled.

“I can say, at last, that all my doubts have faded away.” The queen turned to the prince and Rika and put her hands on theirs. “As queen of the realm, I grant my blessing to your marriage. And at the same time, as a mother, I wish only for the two of you to be happy together. A marriage between two of such different statuses, from different dimensions—you will travel a path no others have tread, but I vow here that I will always have your backs.”

These words gradually sunk in for the couple. The tension on their faces drained away. And just before Rika burst into tears, the prince’s arms tightened around her.

Mamako started clapping, and Kanako joined her, wiping her eyes. “Congratulations!” “I’m so happy for you!” Mone and Porta both threw their arms high in a cheer.

Medhi returned from the dungeon, clapping, too. Wise was lying on the ground behind her, immobile, but whatever.

Masato should probably say something, too, but...

“Ah yes. One more thing...”

“Huh? Uh, Your Majesty, is something the matter?”

“No. Not that... It’s just... We got a report from the guards. Two suspicious women were causing trouble at the dungeon entrance. Seemed like they were trying to disrupt the trial. They were much too quick, and the guards were unable to arrest them.”

“Got it. Leave them to us. Nothing like a little combat to wrap things up.”

Masato’s companions all nodded in agreement.

The guards and some workmen from town spent all night getting ready.

The prince and Rika were to be married the next day in the castle chapel.

The bells tolled the glad tidings, and the bride and groom entered.

“Here we go, Your Highness.”

“Y-yes...”

Rika was totally calm, but the prince seemed rather nervous. He couldn’t stop sweating.

The prince wore a white tuxedo, and Rika a wedding dress with a long train. They slowly walked down the aisle together. “Whoa!” The little girl holding the train up—the train bearer—stumbled but managed to stay upright.

In the seats of honor sat two mothers—the queen and Kanako—looking tense as the bride and groom reached the priest.

“*Ahem.* Two who have surpassed the trial need give no further oaths. May your kiss serve as your vow, and your wedding be confirmed. You may proceed.”

“Thank you... Come, my prince.”

“O-okay...”

Their kiss. Rika closed her eyes, waiting, and the prince’s face drew near...

Their lips almost touching but not yet kissing...

Still not there... Almost... Not quite yet...

Just then—

“Stop!”

“We won’t allow this weddiing!”

—the doors blew open, and Amante and Sorella burst in. Backed by an

undead army.

In that moment...

“You...Y-you’re laaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaate, dammit! Are you guys trying to kill me?!”

““Huh?””

This cry had come from the prince. A puff of smoke materialized around him, and Masato appeared in his usual long jacket, a gauntlet on his left hand. His sword at his hip.

“Wha—?! Masato Oosuki?!”

“You used transformation magiiiic?!”

“Exactly. And...!”

His party undid their spells, too. The queen and Kanako were Wise and Medhi. The priest was Mone. The train bearer was Porta. All were in their usual gear, ready for combat.

The attendees revealed their true forms as well: rows of guards in full plate armor, royal Mages carrying expensive looking tomes. The full might of the Catharn Kingdom.

And the bride? Well, who else would it be? Her transformation faded.



“Whew! That was so uncomfortable! This dress is much too small for me.”

Mamako appeared in a wedding dress! The fabric at her chest was definitely straining, looking ready to rip!

“Now we can finally settle— Wait, Mom, why are you dressed like that?!”

“Well, before we started this whole operation, I was talking to the queen. I said it had been ages since I wore a wedding dress, so she said I could try it on, and—”

“You knew full well we’d be fighting! What were you thinking?! Go change!”

“Good point. It’d be a real shame to get it dirty... Porta, dear, could you help me get changed?”

“Yes! I’ll help!”

Mamako temporarily retreated. As she headed to the waiting room behind the altar, her party and the assembled soldiers and Mages all applauded. “No need to clap!” shouted Masato. But nobody seemed inclined to stop. Oh well.

Grasping the situation, Amante and Sorella ground their teeth.

“Argh... This sucks! And this means...”

“Yep, you guessed it!” said Masato.

“You were really trying to marry your moooother?! That’s immoraaaaa! A criiiime!”

“Noooooooooooooooooooo!! Argh, I can’t believe you were stupid enough to fall for such an obvious trap! But it’s time for us to defeat your feeble little brains once and for all! ...Everybody, attack!”

Combat time.

At Masato’s order, the royal guards charged the undead army. Honed sword skills and magic quickly tore through the ranks, making up for the numerical disadvantage.

Masato was thrilled.

“Everyone’s following my orders, defeating enemy after enemy... Oh man!

Commanding is super-fun!”

“Commander Masato! I can fight, too! Give me orders!”

“Got it! Mone, you...at present, are forbidden from being spoiled!”

“Whaaat?! If I can’t be spoiled, I can’t control my powers... Oh no... The forbidden power that swallows everything is activating...!”

“Exactly! Keep that up! ...Soldiers! Throw all the bits of the enemy her way! Advance only when it’s clear underfoot!”

“*Sniff*... I’ve been turned into a trash can... This is no way to treat your girlfriend!”

“One for all! All for victory! Just bear with it a little longer!”

Masato’s cunning scheme lent wind to the guard’s onslaught. This was already a rout.

Now they just needed to take down the enemy leaders.

“I owe you one for the changing-room incident! I’ll take on the Heavenly Kings! Wise, Medhi, back me up!”

“Forget it! We’ll take care of them without you!”

“Don’t worry about us, Commander! You stay right there and watch!”

“No, uh... That’s not... I mean, standing at the altar watching everyone fight for me isn’t bad, but I’d rather fight on the front lines, and... You can’t just ignore orders like...!”

He didn’t want to admit they might not trust him.

Wise and Medhi ran back up the aisle toward Amante and Sorella.

“We’re taking you both down!” said Wise.

“That’s our line! You’re no match for us!”

“Try making a lick of sense for once,” said Medhi. “Did you forget how easily we bested you last time?”

“Well, that tiime, we weren’t seriouuuus. But today we aaaare. Soooo...first attaaack! ...*Spara la magia per mirare... Tacere!*”

“Not happening! ...*Spara la magia per mirare... Reflessione! And! Reflessione!*”

Sorella cast a Silence spell. But at the same time, Wise cast a spell that reflected any magic cast on her or Medhi.

The magic-seal effect directed at them went bouncing back to Sorella...

“Gotcha! Ha!”

...but Amante jumped to block it.

Amante had a skill that reflected any attack. The magic seal bounced again.

Wise’s magic was sealed. Medhi’s magic was sealed.

“...What...the...?”

“Wise is one thing, but it even worked on me?!”

“Reflections of reflections always laaaand! You pulled the same trick on Amante last tiime!”

“And now you get a taste of your own medicine! ...Heh, how do you like it? It’s over for you two!”

Amante drew her rapier and hurled herself forward in a powerful lunge.

Rattled by the magic seal, Wise and Medhi didn’t react in time. Both clenched up, closing their eyes.

And just before Amante ran them through...

“No, you don’t!”

...an arm wearing a gauntlet thrust through the space between them. His shield wall deployed, soaking Amante’s Gatling gun-like flurry of stabs. Wise and Medhi were unharmed.

Meanwhile, Masato’s hand was pretty badly damaged, but he elected to grin and bear it like a real man.

“That was a close one... You both okay?”

“Uh, yeah... We’re fine but pissed off!” *Tch.*

“Extremely frustrating. This just isn’t right!” *Tch.*

“Why are you both clicking your tongues?! I expected a different reaction!”

Saving people didn’t usually get you frowned at. Masato was the frustrated one here!

“Whatever—here! The Porta Special! I kept some on hand just in case. Undo that magic seal!”

“Even Masato showed up prepared... Now I’m even more pissed!”

“Are we sure this isn’t the prince disguised as Masato? It would explain everything.”

“I’m not the prince! Quit your—”

“Come on! This is no time for chitchat!”

“Right! Unh!”

Amante’s onslaught was right at their throats. Masato drew his sword, knocking her attack away. “Here, use these!” He tossed the seal-cure jewels to Wise and stepped in front of them.

Attacks from Masato were reflected. The only way to not take himself out was to use his sword and shield wall to deflect the enemy’s attacks, slowly pushing her back.

“Tch... You’ve gotten better at this! Even though you’re just Masato Oosuki! The nerve!”

“You too?! I’m practically ready to cry here! Like, serious blubbering!”

“You’re Masatoooo! You should suck at all thiiiiis! So just... stopppp.”

The massive tome over Sorella’s head opened. A dark light blackened the floor around her, and undead soldiers...

“Not on my watch! ...*Spara la magia per mirare... Purificare!*”

But Medhi’s purification spell went off first. Before the undead soldiers could even fully emerge, holy light struck and vaporized them.

“Now that all the filth has been cleared away, it’s time for the main attraction! Heh-heh-heh...” ...*Rumble, rumble...*

“Eeeeeek! She’s more terrifying than any undead hooooorde!”

“Sorella! Use your debuff skill! Quick!”

“I—I don’t have tiiiime! It’s all I can do to doooodge!”

“Then I’ll take the Cleric—”

“Nope! ...*Spara la magia per mirare... Lento! And! Riflessione!*”

Wise chain cast a spell that lowered the speed reflected off Amante, then reflected it back—and this time it got her.

Amante’s agility dropped. Now they could dodge her powerful blows. Sorella was in a panic and unable to do anything.

“Hell yeah! We’re on the way to victory now!”

“Second straight girl-gang win! Let’s go!”

“Why you...! Right...Sorella!”

“W-we’ve got to ruuuun! Retreeeeeat!”

Amante and Sorella jumped on the giant magic tome, trying to escape.

But Masato had been waiting for that.

“I knew that’s what you’d do... And flying enemies are all miiiiiiine!”

The girls may have wrestled the spotlight back, leaving him standing like an idiot with his sword out, but now he threw his back into a huge swing. “Masato Oosuki is—!” “Of all peeeeeople!” “Fine, just keep doing that, see if I care!” His homing beam scored a direct hit on the tome and knocked Amante and Sorella off.

They fell flat on the floor and were quickly surrounded. There was no escape.

The wedding concerto reached its final movement. Time to wrap things up.

And the one who would do that...

“Thanks for waiting! Mama’s done changing!” Porta’s voice echoed across the chapel.

Mamako had emerged from the changing room.

“I’m a little nervous! Hee-hee!”

Mamako was wearing a white kimono! The obi was embroidered with gold, and her hair was done up in a traditional style, held in place with gold hairpins! The very picture of Japanese tradition!

That’s all well and good, but...

“I said to get changed for *combat*! ...Why are you always like this, Mom?! Argh!”

Rather than a blushing bride, we have a weeping son. But here Mamako was, dressed for an old-fashioned Japanese wedding. Behind her stood the queen and Kanako, the prince and Rika.

The undead army were already routed. The royal guards lined both sides of the aisle, clearing a path for the dignitaries.

And the first one down it was...Mone.

“Masato... I can’t wait any longer... I’m ready to burst...!” A loud whooshing sound accompanied Mone’s cries.

“There, there! Good job maintaining a steady gravitational pull! You can stop now!”

He allowed her to spoil herself all she wanted. Mone calmed down.

Then the party turned and grinned at Amante and Sorella.

“Er... Mamako Oosuki’s outfit is just beyond baffling, but...what’s with these smirks? What are you all plotting?”

“O-oh noooo... Are you all going to beat the tar out of uuuus? That’s not niiiice! You shooooouldn’t!”

“Yeah, you’re right,” agreed Masato. “It’d be out of character.”

“So we’re gonna let you off with a single blow.”

“A really, really big one. From none other than...”

“Mama, of course!”

“Mamako, take it away! Anyone who’d interfere with true love needs a mom

to come along and kick 'em straight to the depths of hell!”

Mamako stepped forward.

“Kicked by a mom? N-no way—is this some ultimate move?!”

“A kick from Mamako might make us exploooode! She’s really going to kick uuuuus?! Wearing thaaaat?! Wait, wait, waaaait!! That just isn’t riiight!!”

“Yes...it does feel a little wrong. But you both tried to trample Rika’s and the prince’s precious feelings and have caused trouble for so many people...”

Mamako took aim and fired!

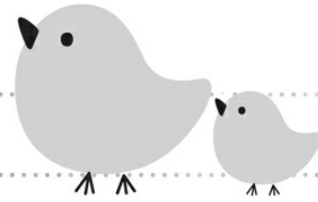
“Tut-tut!”

A hand on her hip, her index finger firmly raised—a scolding laser beam! “Wait, no—!” “That’s not a kiiiick!” Their protests were enveloped in a bride’s joyous light.

And Amante and Sorella were sent flying through the demolished door, vanishing far off into the distance.

Mom Consultation Forum 5

Mama's BBS



Question

Submitted by: JUST AN ANONYMOUS USER, NO NEED TO EXPLAAAAAIN



Right to the point! Tell us how we can beat Mamako Oosuki!

Answer

MAMAKO



That's easy! If you just be nice to Mommy and do things that make Mommy happy, I'll keel over from happiness! Hee-hee!

ANONYMOUS
(AMANTE)

No point in tempting us! Being nice to mothers is out of the question! Besides, we don't even have mothers!



ANONYMOUS
(HAHAKO)



I ran a search for people with no mothers. I'm about to commence user identification, so just wait a few moments. I'll be right there.

ANONYMOUS
(SORELLA)

Whaaaat? Someone else just barged iiiiin... She's not actually going to, like, identify us and show up here, riiiiight? This is a joke, riiiiight?



Epilogue

Several days after the fake wedding...

With the prince and Rika's royal wedding scheduled for next week, the capital of Catharn was in a celebratory mood. People were decorating the streets, soldiers were conducting security drills, customers were flocking to the wedding commemorative sales, and there was a smile on every face.

Except for two faces, both white as sheets: those of Amante and Sorella, who were frantically running down an alley.

"Sorella! Hurry! Argh, why are you so slow?!"

"I—I caaaan't! *Hah, hah!* I've never liked exerciiiise!"

"This is no time for grumbling! We've got to run, or else... *Gasp!*"

"Whaaaaat? Oh... Aughhhh!"

As they rounded a corner, both came screeching to a halt.

Hahako was there. She might look exactly like Mamako, but her expression was vacant, and there was an aura of stillness about her.

"Will you two please wait a moment? I just want to talk."

"We've got nothing to talk about!"

"Stop chasing uuus! Byeeee!"

Both girls spun on their heels, running back the way they'd come. But Hahako came rising up out of the street ahead of them.

Hahako was a unique being created by the game systems based on Mamako's data. She could spawn anywhere, from anything.

"Please? Just for a few minutes?"

"How many times do we have to say we don't wanna talk to you?! How long are you gonna chase us?!"

“Did Mamako put you up to thiiiiis? Did she tell you to keep an eye on us so we can’t interrupt the weddiiiiing?”

“Not at all. This is my own decision. I just want to talk to you both.”

“Well, fiiiiine... Amante, what do you thiiiink?”

“What do I...? Argh, fine! We’re not getting anywhere running, obviously! So just say your piece already!”

“Well, I just have this one question...,” Hahako said nervously. “Do the two of you have mothers?”

“...Huh?”

“Do we have motherrrrs? Ummm...”

“You see, I went to the courtship ball hoping to find a child, but it didn’t work out...”

“You were definitely in the wrong place. Duh.”

“Ms. Shiraaase was helping me, and she suggested I start by finding people who don’t have mothers. I thought that seemed like good advice, so I’m searching for motherless people... Do you two count?”

“Well, that’s obvioooous. We’re in the Libere Rebelliiiion. We’re against the existence of motherrrrs. And we’re two of the Four Heavenly Kiiiings! Of course we have no moooms.”

“...You don’t have any mothers? You don’t, yes? I see!”

Hahako’s expression brightened immediately.

Meanwhile, Amante and Sorella somehow grew even paler.

“W-wait?! Let’s be clear, that doesn’t mean we’re going to make *you* our mother!”

“These things require mutual conseeent! No brainwashiiiiing! You can’t force people to be your childreeeen!”

“Yes, I know! You have to spend a long time together, building lots of memories, and that way, you become parent and child! I’ve learned that that’s what families are! I know that now... So I’m going to stay with you forever!”

Hahako beamed.

“You can’t just decide that! ...Sorella! We’ve gotta run!”

“Retreeeeeat! Retreeeeeat!”

“Oh my! Are we playing mother-daughter tag? I won’t lose! Hee-hee!”

Racing desperately down one back road after another, the two Heavenly Kings found Hahako appearing everywhere they went. Their game of tag showed no signs of ending.

“...So we can leave them to Hahako?”

“Yes. The wedding should be able to proceed without interference.”

“Hahako’s trying to make Amante and Sorella her daughters...? Hee-hee. I think that sounds wonderful.”

“Hmm... Well, if a cross-dimensional wedding is possible... Either way, we’ve managed to fulfill Rika’s request, so that wraps things up.”

The party had returned to the capital to check up on things and were on break at the Mom Shop.

The girls were busy working on the exterior decorations, while Masato, Mamako, and Shiraaase talked.

“So, Shiraaase. In actual fact, are test players and NPCs allowed to get married?”

“There are no restrictions in place, so it is possible. Management is currently monitoring the prince and Suzuya’s example and intend to create such restrictions if it proves necessary.”

“So this wedding’s an experiment?”

“In part, certainly. Ms. Suzuya will be required to file reports on their life together...and continue working as a character designer. A computer has been installed in her room at the castle.”

“Management sure is a slave driver...”

“Perhaps not the most relaxed honeymoon...”

“We can’t let just one individual have all the joy. This is how these things are celebrated in any workplace. That aside... There’s something I’d like to ask you, Masato. If you don’t mind?”

Shiraaase took a sip of tea, watching him carefully.

Whatever she said next was definitely going to be bad news.

“Masato, do you have any intention of settling down with Mone?”

“Yep, I knew it. I knew that was coming... Let me be very clear. I—”

“Someday he’ll marry me, and we’ll live here together!”

“Yikes! Where’d you come from?!”

Mone had come hurtling through the front door and flung herself at Masato. “Mm—heh-heh. *Rub, rub.*” “Stop rubbing!” She always went for the quick spoiling.

The rest of the girls came back in, too. “Wow! You two are getting along so well!” Porta said, smiling happily.

But Wise and Medhi both frowned, giving him a long stare.

“...Uh, at least say something?” Masato pleaded.

“There’s nothing to say.”

“And if we do say something, Mone and Ms. Shiraaase will just make it worse.”

“I’m offended. Mone may certainly make things worse, but not I. I would never point out how Mone’s behavior is clearly affecting you both.”

“You just did.”

“I knew it. Defensive expressions were the right tactic.”

Wise and Medhi acted normally, like they didn’t care. “We totally overdid it on those decorations. Worked up a real sweat!” “Yes, it’s very hot.” Fanning themselves, they loosened their collars, trying to look relaxed.

Shiraaase and Mamako just smiled at each other, but that was all. Nothing

more.

“Hmm... Well, enough about Wise and Medhi. Masato?”

“Nope, I’m not answering anything.”

“If—just if—you were to marry somebody here, who would you choose?”

“Sorry, I couldn’t even hear that one. Man, this tea’s good!”

It was royal tea, sent by the royal family as a reward for their efforts. Had a lot of depth to it.

Savoring that depth was much better than these silly conversations.

It was so quiet.

Everyone by Masato was sitting perfectly still, staring at him.

Ignore them. They don’t matter. Just carry on.

More tea. Good tea. The best.

It was so good, his cup was already empty. But he wanted more.

“Mom, can I have another—?”

“Whaaat?! Ma-kun, you want to marry Mommy?! We can’t... Oh, but I could never turn down a proposal from you... Oh, what should Mommy do?” She clapped her hands to her cheeks.

“Huh?! Wha—?! Mom, what are you talking about?!”

“Mamako, Masato, congrats! I wish you a lifetime of happiness!”

“Wise! I *will* punch you!!”

Wise smiled gently and started clapping. Medhi, Porta, and Shiraaase all did, too. “There’s no way I can beat Mamako. *Sniff.*” Mone sobbed bitterly but... clapped for them anyway.

And thus, Mamako and Masato tied the knot. *FIN.*

“Ma-kun, let’s live happily ever after! Hee-hee!”

“Knock it off already! There’s no way I’d ever marry my mom!”

Just kidding, of course!

Afterword

Thank you for reading. This is Inaka.

Because of you, this series has reached Volume 6! I can't thank you enough.

This volume includes a few short stories that originally appeared in *Dragon* magazine alongside a new story—a slightly unusual structure.

When putting the volume together, I was forced to reread a manuscript I'd written over a year ago, right around the time I first made my debut. I won't say I'm ashamed of my past, but there were certainly shocks to be had, and I definitely cringed a lot. (Personal feelings only. Some say my current work is not noticeably different.) But noticing your own previous shortcomings is a sign that you have grown. I choose to believe this and continue to move forward. I hope you will continue to follow me.

Once again, I've received tremendous support from Iida Pochi.; my editor, K; everyone involved with publishing and sales; and many more. I'd like to take this moment to give them all a warm thanks.

I'd also like to thank and congratulate Meicha, who is drawing the manga version, the first volume of which is being released the same day as this volume.

There are many plans in the works, so make sure you don't miss them!

Finally, not to make things personal...

But on Mother's Day 2018, I made my usual phone call to my mother.

"I still have the present you gave me for Mother's Day when you were in junior high."

A polka-dot apron—far too cute for a mom—chosen by a junior high schooler with no real clue what his mother's tastes were...is still sitting in a drawer somewhere at home.

Once again, I'm reminded of how awful my taste once was...

But still, this is further proof I've grown! I choose to be glad for what I've done, as it's better than doing nothing.

PS: Dad, let me use the afterword for this once more: Happy Birthday.

Early summer 2018, Dachima Inaka

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